



HORSEMANSHIP

HEALTH & HEALING

with Mel Fleming & Tony Robinson

Rugging

Rugging – to rug or not to rug.

Like many other aspects of the horse world there is much controversy over rugging. This article is not to argue one way or the other but to remind people to use common sense and give you a few more perspectives.

Horses are designed to cope with very cold temperatures when the conditions are right.

They are in fact better able to cope with the cold better than the heat. Overheating is much more of a problem in horses than most people realize and this can often be due to over rugging and leaving rugs on during the day-even winter days.

In ideal situations horses don't need rugs. These situations include plenty of room to move, shelter from wind and rain, plenty of roughage as heat is generated as it is being digested, a healthy body and good nutrition.



If horses have no room to move to keep warm, no shelter, are sick or unhealthy wearing a rug may be a good idea for a horse.

However often horses are rugged for human convenience and so they look good for showing rather than really thinking about it from the horses point of view.

The most important point to be made here is that is very uncomfortable, and at times physically distressing for horses to be wearing rugs 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week as in often the case. This is especially the case with heavy winter rugs. It seems that many people think that just because it is winter that horses should get their winter rug on and they wear it day and night until winter is over.

There are many winter days where the temperature gets pretty warm and those horses can be sweltering underneath. Not only is this uncomfortable but it is very unhealthy. Just remember yourself when you have been overheated working or exercising, you just can't wait to rip your jackets off. The horse is

no different. Horses might go for a run or a play and get hot and they can't get their jackets off. We don't go through the day with the same amount of clothing or blankets on as we might use when the temperature drops at night time. It is just common sense.

When horses are healthy, even without rugs, they won't grow an excessively long winter coat as a healthy metabolism and body are able to adjust and cope with cold temperatures. When the body is healthy the body's thermostat will be able to function efficiently to keep the body temperature right. You may have noticed that as horses grow older that their coats become thicker and woollier because ageing often goes hand in hand with unhealthier, but this does not have to be the case either. When horses are healthy their coats will not bleach in the sun, even black horses will stay jet black in the summer. So if your horse is bleaching or gets excessively hairy you need to look deeper into the health of the body.

Here are a few other pointers that you may not have thought about.





Pressure points can cut off the circulation or cause chaffing. Wearing rugs and especially heavy winter rugs all the time can cause horses to get sore particularly in the chest area and points of the shoulders, over the wither or over the hips. This is further exacerbated when rugs don't fit well and slip back or get crooked. This would be similar to you getting a wrinkle in your sock or the pressure of the straps of a heavy bag that is carried over your shoulders, however they can't adjust the sock or put the bag down.

For a while these pressure points will be sore until the area becomes numb and the nervous system's method for coping with chronic pain is to switch off. A switched off nervous system leads to a lack of circulation, ill health, and poor performance. A top class athlete needs the nervous system to be functioning to its highest capacity.

You may have noticed how many horses get nippy and cranky when you go to do the front of the rug up. Take note they are trying to tell you something. They are sore.

If you feel that you need to rug your horse then the rugs should be removed daily to make sure there is no chance of over heating, remember it is better for them to be too cold rather than too hot. Allow them to move freely and unrestricted during the day and to get sunshine on their body. A healthy horse makes a happy horse and a happy horse makes a good pleasure or performance horse.

Horses need sunlight on their skin –

Just like us horses need sunlight on their skin. Sunlight is important for vitamin D synthesis in the body and vitamin D is necessary for maintaining normal Calcium metabolism in the body.

Many horses whose necks are fully covered all the time lose their manes. It literally just starts falling out due to a fungus that starts growing on the skin because of the lack of sunlight.

Horses release a lot of toxins through their skin just like we do. Wearing rugs all the time that are not kept clean on the inside means that horses are constantly reabsorbing these toxins that the body is trying to eliminate.

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Ultimate Horsemanship Experience 5 day course

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