



Horse Care Info Sheet

Managing Athletes into their Second Career

Every year hundreds of racehorses are retired from racing and may begin the road to a second career as a saddle horse. Currently, Combined Training (3 day eventing) is the most popular second career for off the track Thoroughbreds. Racehorses have also been successfully retrained for dressage, performance horses, trail riding and more. After a stressful career as a racehorse, we must consider the potential for lingering injuries that may require management and potentially limit athletic performance.

As always, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In the following fact sheet we discuss key elements in developing strong athletes that will be better able to excel on and off the track!



Musculoskeletal System

- The slow, varied development of a young racehorse towards their racing career is vital for appropriate bony remodelling to occur.
 - ◊ Persistent/repetitive strain will result in micro-damage occurring at a rate faster than the body can repair, resulting in breakdown of that structure.
- Identification and surgical removal of all osteochondrosis fragments in yearlings and rapid correction of race related injuries will reduce the risk of arthritis forming within a joint.
 - ◊ Arthritis is likely the number one contributor to limited performance for racehorses going into their second career.

Gastro-Intestinal-Tract (GIT) (stomach and colon ulcer prevention)

- Letting “horses be horses” is a difficult task at the racetrack but ultimately down time at the farm is the compromise. Allowing horses to be turned out on grass and simply meander the field is not only of great benefit to their minds and their bones but also their gastro-intestinal system.
- The horses’ GIT was designed to receive small volumes of a forage based diet consistently. The management technique of feeding large volumes of concentrate 2-3x per day increases the acid production within the stomach and increases the amount of soluble carbohydrate reaching the hindgut. Both of these factors put the stomach and large colon at risk of ulceration, respectively.

Mental/psychological management

- Stereotypies:
 - ◇ Weaving, cribbing, pawing are all stereotypies that most horse people have come across at some point. Often this is a result of too much time spent in a stall or in isolation versus out working or on turnout.
- “Burnt out” horses are also something most of us have seen. Horses that refuse to enter the ring or act up during the tacking process are a few examples of ‘burnt out’ behaviour.
 - ◇ We need to ensure that this behaviour is not caused by pain. Discuss the benefits of older athletes and the use of joint support supplements. All should have regular soundness examinations by a veterinarian to ensure they are in good working shape and are capable of the work being asked of them.
 - ◇ Building some variation into a horses’ training program (like trail riding) can help keep them happy in their work and reduces the risk of repetitive strain injuries.

Off-the-track racehorses can make excellent partners, both in the competitive ring and out. Ensure that you have any horse examined by a veterinarian prior to purchase and continue to make regular examinations a part of that horses’ maintenance to ensure that they are working well and happy in their training!



Explore Functional Anatomy, Exercise Physiology and learn how to promote healthy Equine Behaviour by taking Equine Guelph’s [12-week online courses](#).