

HORSES AND HOT WEATHER SHOWING

We all have concerns regarding our horse's health during this hot summer show. I have compiled some hot weather tips from various horseman and publications. Consider these and check with your veterinarian to design a plan specific to your horse(s).

- Horses are quite adaptable to the weather. If your horse has had time to acclimate to the heat during conditioning workouts, he should be able to cruise thru this weekend with very little extra care.
- Along with the obvious heat related problems, watch for signs of colic as dehydration can sometimes result in an impaction colic.
- Some Special Olympic Horses are not necessarily in their prime, sound and healthy. There are a few things we can do to help them stay comfortable in the heat. I would suspect it is pretty hot where they live too. If they are used to being out in the pasture, the fans in the barn might even be a welcome relief for them.
- Keep in mind the each horse's condition level especially while exercising and warm up. Remind your volunteers to not exceed his current level of conditioning and to be more watchful of the horses' vitals if they are riding for pleasure at the show.
- Reaves will be air conditioned. One thing I might mention is to try to get your horses in Reaves as much as you can. Let them get used to the fact that it will be cooler in there. Some horses may "wake up" a little when they feel the cool air.

Trailering:

- Trailer your horse in the early morning or evening hours. Offer water more frequently during the trip if possible. Minimize the length of time he spends on the trailer.
- Avoid sitting still, which may mean avoiding heavy traffic times.
- Consider a battery operated "personal fan", properly secured, in the stalls of the trailer.
- Most trailer floors are not well insulated and transfer road heat. Adding a layer of wet shavings or, even better, wet bedding pellets (woody pet, equine pine) down to form "wet sawdust" that will provide a cool barrier to the road heat.
- Remember to open your trailer and let it air out before you are ready to load horses.
- If you feed hay in the trailer, wet it well or soak it first. Try it at home to be sure you horse will eat it wet.
- Do not feed hard grains prior to trailering.
- Weigh the advantages of hot quilts and wraps with lighter weight shipping boots or maybe just bell boots.

In the Stall:

- Have adequate amounts (at least 10 gal) cool clean water available to your horse at all times in the stall. Offer your horse cool clean water every hour or so if he is out in the heat. Horses can double their water intake during hot humid conditions even without increasing exercise.
- If your horse doesn't seem to be drinking his normal amount or more, soak his feed and hay in water. You might try this at home first to be sure it is to his liking.
- If he is used to grazing, hand graze him in the cool part of the day. He may be used to getting some of his water in the fresh grass.

Using Electrolytes and/or salt:

- If your horse is sweating more than usual or if the combination of heat and humidity is extremely high, consider giving your horse electrolytes specifically designed for horses. You may give it in water or top dress feed, or a special formula in an oral dose syringe. Whichever you prefer, always have plain water available as well and give it at home first to know that your horse will eat it.
- ****Do *not* give electrolytes if you suspect your horse is already moderately or severely dehydrated. Contact a veterinarian if the horse is showing signs of moderate to severe dehydration.**
- Plain table salt, on the other hand, is always good to encourage drinking and replace sodium lost in sweat. An ounce a day added to the grain ration is a good average to consider.

The reports from those who have shown recently in the hot weather in Perry is that the BIG A** FANS that are throughout the barn and covered arena do quite a good job reducing the temperature. You may bring an additional "box" fan to attach to your stall fronts. Make sure that the horse cannot get to the cords. You can use bungee cords or zip ties to fix it to the bars.

Check with your veterinarian for the proper methods of monitoring your horses' vital signs as well as their normal values. Teach your volunteers how to recognize any danger signs before they become severe.

The most efficient way to reduce temperature is to cold hose. The proper way to do this is to run cool/cold water over the horse and immediately scrape it off. Do this until the water and skin feels cool. Water is a great insulator and any water that remains on the horse will actually raise his temperature. Air movement, a fan or outside breeze in the shade will further encourage evaporation and reduce temperature.

There are a couple of medical conditions that are heat related.

Anhydrosis: The most important condition to watch for is anhydrosis. Sometimes horses lose the ability to sweat in very hot, humid weather. It can be temporary or long lasting. There is no single, specific medical reason for this. You may notice that your horse is totally dry during periods that he should be sweating or you may see that his sweating is spotty and reduced. Either way, this could be a potentially

dangerous condition and require immediate action to bring down your horse's temperature. If you suspect your horse is suffering from anhidrosis, contact a veterinarian for a diagnosis. It is not curable, but there are supplements that can help and sometimes even normalize sweating. A large number of horses in the southeast suffer from anhidrosis and most can be managed at even higher levels of competition.

While unlikely, it is possible that a previously normal horse could suddenly stop sweating. Therefore it is important to know each horse's normal pattern and watch for any changes at the show.

Cushings Disease: Another condition that some of our horses suffer from is Cushing's disease. Cushing's horses sometimes have a little extra trouble regulating their body temperature. Those that own these horses know that they do not always shed their winter coats well and some require body clipping. Prepare these horses by considering clipping a horse with a thicker/longer than normal coat or by adding an extra body clip if necessary to help them to cool themselves more normally.