

TACK

Firstly, use gear that has been tried and found suitable in training.

Training times are when all adjustments and experiments should be tried and either accepted or discarded.

In extreme cases people have changed saddles/bridles etc at a ride with very mixed results

A novice horse may react totally differently at a ride than he does in training, that is why it is good to try and train occasionally with a group of horses just to judge your horse's reactions and adjust your gear accordingly. Some horses are naturally very competitive and no matter how well you try to school them, they won't change, especially with the adrenaline rush at a ride. The bridle / bit that you use will have the most impact on you controlling the situation.

BRIDLES- Range from rope headcollars, bitless, hackamores to standard bridles that carry a bit. There is a thousand and one types of bits, ranging from very soft to severe. Trial and error is possibly the best way-control for you-comfort for the horse.

The bridles without bits make it easier for the horse to eat and drink on track.

SADDLES-The best advice- find a saddle that suits the horse first and foremost, then adapt yourself to it. The breed of horse will have a bearing on saddle type, an Arab is a totally different shape to a Quarter horse or a Standardbred .

Saddles in my opinion, create more problems for the horse, especially over time than any other piece of gear. Too many people only care about their own comfort, which is also essential, hopefully a compromise can be found for both horse and rider.

Also every horse is different, so no one saddle will suit every horse, a lot of success has been had with using different styles of well fitting saddles on the one horse as this changes pressure points and areas that are tending to rub.

Personally, I have had the most success with "military" style saddles that have wide flat pads, some of the newer styles have neoprene rubber pads that velcro onto the base of the saddle, so they can be adjusted in/out or forward /back to suit. They also come with shims that can be placed to adjust the pad to suit the horse's conformation and when the horses changes shape during the season when it becomes fitter.

There are many types and styles of saddle with new “innovative” types coming onto the market all the time, just remember that fit and comfort for your horse is paramount, hopefully the saddle is comfortable for you as well.

GIRTHS-Leather, string, neoprene, the choices again are varied. I prefer the neoprene type as they are non-galling, low maintenance and easy to clean. Before the neoprene type was widely used, the leather girth with a lambswool cover were used widely, also very good, just higher maintenance, as the covers need washing.

BREASTPLATES and CRUPPERS- a breastplate is pretty much essential for endurance, as it will stop the saddle moving back and is used to attach rings to if needed.

A crupper is only needed if you can't stop your saddle moving forward, which could be from a small withered horse, overweight horses with a large belly, the girth tends to move forward, allowing the saddle to go forward as well, or maybe nedly is just one of those that won't stop pulling, which can also contribute to the saddle going forward. Just a word of warning, take time to get your horse used to a crupper. A lot of horses react badly, especially going downhill for the first time with a newly installed crupper. At home and training are the times to make your horse comfortable with one.

EXTRAS – brush boots, bell boots etc. My opinion is, only use if necessary they are just more things to rub and chafe. Maybe it is time to look at the “root cause”, why does Neddy brush or overreach? Shoeing is probably the main culprit besides conformation, shoeing can be changed, sadly conformation can't

Lastly, Tack maintenance is really important, make sure everything is in good order, nothing worse than being 20kms from home and your girth breaks or a stirrup leather gives out. I'm sure women are much more diligent in checking their gear, the bloke thing is “she'll be right”, maybe it won't!

STRAPPING

Horses mostly like routine, creatures of habit. So establish a strapping routine early when you start a up a horse in it's training. Get the horse used to a routine, It doesn't really matter too much the sequence, after you have de-bitted and unsaddled the horse, as long as it is consistent. For Example

-De-bit put on head collar, unsaddle

-wash the horse- water temperature depends on the prevailing weather conditions. If it is bitterly cold, no washing may occur, just rugging, if it is cool, warm water wash then rugging, if it is warm to hot, cool to cold washing. There are different schools of thought about getting the heat out of a horse when it is hot. Constantly washing/pouring cold water over the horse, hosing is the best and easiest. The other thought is wash then scrape off the water then repeat until the horse's pulse is okay. Once again it depends what is available and what suits the individual horse.

Some horses haven't been hosed before, so at a ride, it is probably best not to try this for the first time, stick to what the horse knows.

-rug or not. It is best to let your strappers observers dictate the local conditions, usually the rider is warm after coming off a leg, so their judgement may not be very accurate, rug as advised. I have found it is far better to have your horse over warm than cool in all but very hot conditions.

-check pulse, if high, more washing may be required, if okay move onto next "chore"

-allow to pee, usually in their yard, possibly combine with letting the horse relax and eat a bit. Be careful Eating can raise some horse's pulses, also some horses become agitated if they aren't allowed to eat and their pulse goes up. It depends on the individual horse, hopefully by this stage you know what suits Mr Ed

-allow access to water, straight clean water or electrolyte water is totally your horses choice, some will drink anything others won't

-check feet and shoes/boots, horses have been vetted out because riders didn't check their horse's feet, only to find out latter that there was a large rock wedged between the frog and shoe.

-check for injuries/rubs/ galls-treat

-slow walk-possible grazing, whatever relaxes the horse

-check pulse-early present if so desired if pulse is suitably low- allows more time for horse back at camp to relax and eat

-otherwise, arrive at vet area several minutes early to let horse relax

-present and pray

One of the biggest points I feel is for the whole camp to stay calm and relaxed during the strapping and pre-vetting process, the horse picks up on the “panic” factor and maybe become unsettled themselves.

GEAR needed- the absolute minimum and also pretty much everything needed is:-

Water-heaps of

Buckets, varying sizes

Sponges and or hose, if you have tap access

Fire bucket or access to hot water

Scraper

Towels- there is nothing like a good rub

Electrolyte to add to drinking water + molasses for taste

Various rugs

Stethoscope/heart rate monitor

Hoof pick- for checking feet

Vet gear- wound creams and liniments, gall creams Etc

Neddy's favourite foods to tempt

Get to know and appreciate your horse, happy riding!