

Stride Ahead in 2018 Nikki Malcolm

Training a horse is like baking a cake, you all need roughly the same ingredients, but recipes vary and some come out better than others, most good chefs don't follow a recipe to the letter and can rescue a potential disaster, a lesser cook will end up with a soggy bottom and it going wrong.....there are similarities, the methods which stand the test of time are the safe bets!

Preparing for the season ahead

When preparing for a new season and planning your training regime its best to start with a clean sheet so get teeth checked, jabs up together, the saddle checked, and horse checked by the Physio. Have a chat with your farrier about your winter plans (do you want shoes off at all) and next seasons plans. It's helpful to talk to a nutritionist to help make adjustments as the workload changes, it can be beneficial to analyse your haylage / forage when talking to a nutritionist, so you know what your horse is getting from the bulk of the feed. It can also be good to have bloods run so you have a knowledge of base levels and then you can refer to this and compare later in the season if you have any problems.

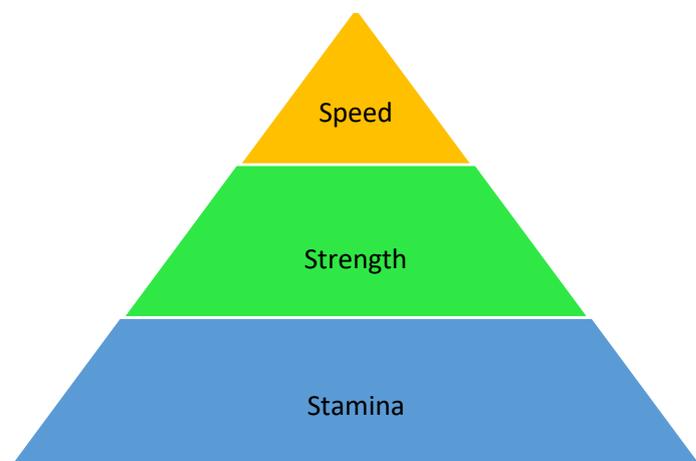
Over the winter period you have various issues to contend with depending on whether the horse is turned out or stabled, some people will not have a choice but if you do you should consider the pros and cons of both. Wet fields can result in foot abscesses and mud fever and pulled shoes whilst stabling brings it own set of problems with respiratory issues caused by dust, cobwebs and bedding affecting air quality. If you are turning the horse out onto frozen ground, you need to consider the risk of slipping and twisting joints on frozen ruts and perhaps consider turn out boots.

Training

When it comes to training you need to plan some rides to aim for and train the horse for this as just riding isn't enough, and the horse won't gain much more than a loss in body mass from singular bouts of occasional exercise.

Horses are natural athletes, but training can enhance this natural ability by increasing exercise capacity and delay the onset of fatigue and increasing overall performance of strength, speed and endurance. This will improve your chances of reaching your goals and lower risk of mechanical breakdown resulting in vet's bills or worse.

The Training Pyramid



Early Season Training

Early season training you need to be careful of muddy bridle paths where slipping and sliding are not beneficial and can injure the horse. Its also worth tying tails up to prevent brambles and sticks getting caught and scaring the horse. It can be best at this time of year to stick to steady road work. Brisk marching is great exercise and it's also a good time to practice you 'pick trot' (an Australian term for a slow trot with a lot of impulsion dictated by rider's seats and rising rhythm) which is much more beneficial than a concussive fast trot! You can also practice your trotting up work on stretches with your horse and strapping to promote muscle tone.

You don't need to gallop at the gallops!

Gallops can be useful at all stages of fitness training. They are great when the conditions are bad on tracks and fields as you can work on a safe surface. You don't need to gallop, you can start with interval training (multiple exercise bouts separated by relatively short rest periods) which can start with trot periods with a short walk break in between and build up to add in canter/ trot interval training, for example aim to build to 3 x 3km periods of trot and canter with two-minute rests in between. The you can progressively load the horse by increasing speed or duration or decreasing the recovery time BUT don't be tempted to do too much too soon, stick to what you have planned.

Hill gallops are great for working horses anaerobically, but it doesn't need to be fast. The horse needs to be well held and working from behind and into the bridle balanced by the rider in a rhythm, if you have access to a heart rate monitor make a note or heart rates on the way up and note recovery times on the way back down (you are looking for 90 beats or below) keep a note for next time the exercise is repeated to see the improvement in fitness.

Remember.....

Keep a diary or work and feed as something to refer to if needed.

Take care in slippery or deep going

Don't trot too fast, keep a steady trot with more impulsion and keep position and balance, avoid riding upsides, change diagonal and change lead legs, hold outside rein into bends, feel that the horse is up together, avoid riding with one hand (you will end up riding at an angle with a twist in your pelvis so not balanced) and avoid over biting.

At a Ride

At an endurance ride remember to warm up properly, don't run like a kid for the ice cream van....be the cool jogger in the park. Respect experienced combinations they have a good idea of pace.

If you go wrong don't lose your head.

Don't cheat yourselves with results, if a 50/50 verdict goes your way don't kid yourself that everything was ok or if average speeds are a bit generous because the course rode a bit short don't fool yourself into believing you were riding faster than you were.

Remember that niggles to aches that turn to issues that snowball out of control.....there is no smoke without fire! So, if you come back from a ride with a physical niggle with you or the horse or a schooling issue which needs more work get it fixed!

It's worth keeping a record of the ride including details such as journey time, stabling and Accomodation and how you find it. An example can be found here(Ride report forms)

The only person you should try to be better than is the person you were yesterday

There are no shortcuts to any place worth going

Make your comebacks stronger than your setbacks

Stride Ahead - Equine Fitness and Rehabilitation and backing and pre-training

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