7 Winter Trail Riding Hazards

By Heather Smith Thomas

Winter trail riding can be fun if you're prepared. Of course, you try to avoid the trail riding hazards that might get you and your horse into real trouble, such as blizzards and ice storms. But Mother Nature has a wicked sense of humor. A nice winter day can turn nasty in minutes. You might find yourself riding in snow far deeper than you'd anticipated or suddenly sliding downhill on an icy trail.

Here, we tell you how to negotiate seven winter riding hazards: (1) deep snow; (2) snowdrifts; (3) frozen ground; (4) ice; (5) packed snow; (6) freezing rain/ice storm; and (7) slippery mud/deep mud. We also give you tips on how to stay warm in the saddle, for comfort and safety.

Hazard #1: Deep snow
Why it's hazardous: Your horse may panic in a deep snow bank and flounder about, possibly pulling a muscle, or straining tendons and ligaments. Deep snow can also cover underlying trail hazards, such as holes and sharp objects.

What you should do: Find and stick to trails and roadways where the snow isn't as deep. Keep your horse well collected, with his weight back over his hindquarters. A collected horse usually has a "spare leg" to catch himself, because his weight is more evenly distributed in relationship to his center of gravity; he'll be more agile with less effort than if he carries his weight on his forehand. At the same time, give him enough rein so that he can use his head and neck for balance.

Keep in mind that moving through deep snow will tire your horse, especially if the snow is wet and heavy. (Fine, powdery, dry snow is much easier for him to step through.) Scale back your ride, especially if he isn't in top shape. Otherwise, he may become worn out and sore, and/or develop muscle cramps.

Avoid brushing against snow-covered trees and bushes. You can get chilled if a load of snow falls down your neck, and onto your bare hands and saddle seat. Your horse may also spook at the falling snow.

Hazard #2: Snowdrifts
Why they're hazardous: Blowing, drifting snow can fill ditches and gullies, leaving a smooth landscape. You won't know your horse is walking into a hole or deep gully until the ground drops out from under him, and he's floundering or falling down.

What you should do: Stick to familiar trails; don't travel cross-country, where the terrain is rougher. Avoid riding through the drifted areas, if possible. You may not be able to gauge drift depth until your horse is up to his belly and struggling to wallow through.

Hazard #3: Frozen ground
Why it's hazardous: Frozen ground is second only to sheer ice in slickness. Even grass is slippery when frozen. Your horse's feet are designed to cut into the ground a little with each step, for traction. If he can't dig into the hard, frozen surface, his feet will slip at every step. And he may go down so quickly that you won't have time to pull your foot out of the stirrup and get out of harm's way.

What you should do: Take it slow. Travel at a walk, and avoid sudden turns
or stops. Try to stay on flat terrain. Especially try to avoid going downhill; horses usually have better traction going up than down.

Never go around the side of a hill; instead, ride straight up or straight down the hill. When you get to a more level area, you can continue in the direction you wish to go. When going downhill, a surefooted horse that's going straight can slip and slide all the way to the bottom and still keep his feet underneath himself. Even if he slides down on his haunches, he won't fall. However, if he's traveling at an angle to the hill, his feet may slip out from under him, causing a bad fall.

If your horse is reasonably surefooted, don't dismount, unless you can get well away from him as you lead him. It's safer to stay on him than to risk slipping and falling. Once you go down, your horse may then inadvertently slide into or run over

you. If the footing is that treacherous, you won't have any better traction than your horse, especially if you're wearing smooth-soled riding boots. He has four legs for balance; you have only two.

If you do need to dismount, stay well out of your horse's way and off to the side, in case he slides or falls. Dismount off his right side, if it seems safer.

Even if you're traveling on dry, safe terrain, beware of shaded areas and north-facing slopes that don't get much winter sun. These areas may still be frozen and treacherous.

Hazard #4: Ice
Why it's hazardous: All ice is treacherous, from frozen puddles and ice-covered streams to melted snow that's re-frozen. A heavy, wet snow that then freezes to the ice can provide a little traction, but a wet snow or rain that freezes over ice will just make it even more slippery. A fine, powdery snow on ice may also make it more slippery.

On ice, your horse can easily lose his footing, scramble, and fall down, then have trouble getting up again. If your horse does the "splits," he may seriously injure himself, as well as put you at risk as he struggles and falls.

What you should do: Avoid riding across patches of ice, if at all possible. Watch for ice hidden under fresh snow, which is especially treacherous. If you suspect there's ice under the snow in a certain spot, go around it.

If you ride frequently in winter, consider shoeing your horse with traction in mind. Consult your farrier for options.

Hazard #5: Packed snow
Why it's hazardous: Packed snow can be just as slippery as ice. A polished trail or road, packed by hoof traffic or vehicles, is ice, and very slippery indeed.

What you should do: Try to find a path through undisturbed snow, which is much less slippery than a packed track. Ride to the side of the trail if you need to. If you're traveling with a group, keep in mind that while the ride leader may be gaining traction in fresh, undisturbed snow, the horses who follow will be on slippery, packed snow.

The ride leader should go slowly to allow for this hazard.

Hazard #6: Freezing rain/ice storm
Why they're hazardous: Your horse is at great risk for an injury-inducing fall. Unlike other hazards, which you might be able to go around, ice coats every surface. Preparing for a ride, or if you dismount, you're likely to slip and fall.

What you should do: If all surfaces are coated with ice, choose a better day for a ride. If you're on a long ride and get caught in freezing rain or an ice storm, choose the safest route home possible. Keep to a walk, and avoid sloping ground, even if it means going a longer way around an area of risky footing.

Hazard #7: Slippery mud/deep mud
Why they're hazardous: Wet, slippery mud puts your horse at risk for a fall. Deep mud also increases your horse's risk of falling, as he may not be able to pull his feet up quickly enough to catch himself, especially if he hits mud unexpectedly.

Also in deep mud, your horse may struggle and flounder, possibly pulling muscles, tendons, or ligaments, or damaging joints. As he struggles, he may kick off a shoe. The mud itself can pull off a shoe.

What you should do: In slippery mud, see the precautions for negotiating frozen ground (Hazard #3), especially on hills. If the trail is dry, still watch out for shaded areas, such as timbered slopes, where the ground may still be wet and muddy. Also watch for wet soil over frozen ground, especially as spring approaches.

In deep mud, keep your horse calm, and go slow; it takes extra effort for him to pull his feet out at each step. If he moves faster than a walk (or tries to jump over or through a muddy area) and becomes mired, his momentum may throw him down head over heels, taking you with him.

If you must dismount in mud, scrape the mud off the bottom of your boots before you remount. Muddy boots can slide out of the stirrups, impeding your balance. Use a rock, sagebrush - whatever is available - to remove the mud.

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GAMES YOUR HORSES PLAY WHEN WE AREN'T THERE.....!!

Are you a stall-bound horse? Want to amuse yourself and your human? Well, here are some fun activities for you!

1) Poop in the water game
This will test your coordination and spatial abilities. Horses all over the world practice this, every day. You must try to poop in your water container (note: drink water first, so you won't go thirsty!). If your water container is too high to poop in, you can attempt to poop on the stall's door, or on the wall. This also gives your human something to do-- when they see what you've done, they will marvel at your special abilities, then happily provide you with fresh water.

2) Pee in the water game
A real challenge for geldings and stallions! Attempt to pee in your water container. This is a very challenging game. If your water container is up against a wall, you may try to drag it into the middle of your stall.

If your human is dull and fails to realize that you've peed in your water, simply dump it out and they will refill it. This in itself can actually be a game, called the Dump Out Your Water game.

3) Artistic Wood Carving
You can become a wood carver. Use your teeth to chisel the wood of your stall into a beautiful piece of art! At first, you can start with simple shapes -- such as the half-moon bite shape-- and as you become more advanced you can try different forms (big curve shape or multiple bite shapes). Your human will really appreciate this.
Some humans will actually remove your artwork from the stall, and put up fresh, new, unchewed boards-- encouraging you to develop your artistic abilities with a fresh, new canvas!

4) Grain Spilling Game
Try to dump out all of your grain from your grain bucket/container, by turning it over with your nose. It is a fun game. You can even continue to flip the container to be sure that all the grain is dumped on the ground. Then, using your delicate muzzle to guide you, try to pick up all the grain, sorting through the bedding and poop. Amusing, and it makes your grain last longer. Your human will appreciate it too-- he/she may even bring you a new bucket of grain, or challenge you to become better by using more difficult containers!

5) Hay Dunking
In this game, you'll try to grab a bite of hay, carry it to your water container, and dump it in. Dropping hay in your water is fun for both you and your human! Although it's just hay, they will probably come in your stall and remove it from your water (then you can dump more in). This gives humans something to do.

6) Who Can Be The Loudest
If you're stalled with other horses, try a little friendly competition with this game. When it's feeding time, see who can neigh, bang, scream, and kick the loudest in their stalls. Humans will instinctively throw food to the noisiest, most demanding horse, so try to be it. The winner is the horse that the human feeds first.

7) Smoosh The Bedding
In this game, you can attempt to mix your bedding, poop, and hay all together. You do this by walking all around in your stall, until you get a good, even mixture. Some horses walk in circles, or back and forth in a straight line... experiment with different styles to see what you like best. Again, this provides entertainment and exercise for your human, because they will have to clean it all up.

8) Roll in the stall
Attempt to get a good roll, in your stall. If your stall is big, this is easy; however, the smaller the stall, the more difficult it can become. The object is to roll, well, without getting stuck. There is some danger involved in this game, as you could roll up near a wall and get stuck. If you get stuck, make sure you thrash so that your human will notice you, nearly have a heart attack, then come to your rescue. This game is best played when humans are around.

9) Mane Rubbing

Try to rub your mane out in certain spots. Humans like neat manes. That is why they comb, spray, and pull your mane; Save them work by pulling your mane yourself! You can stick your head through the stall (if it has an opening) and try to rub the top of your neck. Or, just rub it on the side of a wall. This will give your mane a nice look that humans appreciate (clumps of hair missing). You'll save them time on having to pull your mane or trim a bridle path.

10) Unique Pooping

This not only provides fun for you, but fun for the human as well, because it makes the regular boring task of mucking more interesting. Try pooping in unusual areas. Poop on top of your door latches, or poop on window ledges. Poop in any food containers, or on top of salt licks. Try to poop any place that is not the ground.

Cold Weather Colic

by: Scott Leibsle, DVM • January 01 2012 • Article # 19407

Well here we are again ... winter! The average horse owner is likely well-acquainted with his or her horse's colic risk regardless of the season, but with cold weather come complicating factors that all owners should prepare for.

The No. 1 cause of colic during winter is a lack of fresh, unfrozen water. Horses must drink 10-12 gallons of fresh water every day and can dehydrate quickly if water is unavailable. Horses that aren't getting enough water are at a greater risk for conditions such as simple indigestion or impaction. A frozen water trough is the usual dehydration culprit, but occasionally horses choose to not drink water simply because it is so cold. Heaters for your troughs and buckets are therefore an absolute "must" to ensure continual access to water in the winter. Keep in mind that electrolyte supplements are not a suitable water substitute and do not mitigate the risk of dehydration. There is nothing wrong with adding (appropriate amounts of) electrolytes to your horse's diet, but offer them in a separate container, leaving the main water supply clean and fresh. Horses might attempt to eat snow to compensate for some fluid loss, but snow is largely composed of air and will not provide the volume of water necessary to hydrate a 1,000-pound animal.

The treatment for a case of dehydration is fairly obvious: fluid replacement. On the farm, your veterinarian will most likely pass a stomach tube through the horse's nose and administer oral fluids as well as an intestinal lubricant such as mineral oil. In cases of moderate or severe dehydration, intravenous fluids can be administered via catheter for a much quicker delivery route, but most veterinarians will choose to administer these types of treatments in a more controlled clinic setting. Use of oral or injectable anti-inflammatories such as flunixin meglumine (Banamine) and phenylbutazone (Bute) is also commonplace.

The second colic risk factor associated with winter is exposure to cold temperatures. A horse with a full hair coat should have no trouble staying warm on the coldest of winter days, even without a blanket, as long as he remains dry and has access to shelter. Blankets are useful for horses that have been body-clipped because they have lost the added layer of insulation the hair provides, but blankets must be applied responsibly. Always replace or remove a soaked blanket immediately because the

moisture will freeze, trapping the cold and causing the horse to lose precious body heat. If your horse wears a blanket, there should be at least two or three on hand so a soaked article can be traded out for a dry one.

Increasing the forage in a horse's diet will help prevent impactions and will also reduce the risk of hypothermia (low body temperature). Horses require more calories in the winter just to stay warm, and the body's fermentation process for digesting hay and roughage also generates heat that helps maintain body temperature. The best colic prevention in this situation is to allow a horse 24-hour forage access so the fermentation process never slows or stops. Adding grain and sweet feed supplements (if warranted) is fine, but they do not provide the same warming and digestive benefits as a continual forage supply.

Shelter is equally important, even to those horses that are accustomed to being outside all the time. A permanent structure built to withstand the force of strong winds and the weight of excessive snow accumulation is ideal, but temporary structures such as canvas or vinyl canopies with steel frames will also work if secured properly.

If you observe your horse experiencing mild hypothermia (a body temperature lower than 99.5°F, signs of lethargy, and a reluctance to move), remove him from the elements so he can thaw out and recover; the sooner he gets out of the cold, the better. For owners that don't have a barn, a garage can be a temporary substitute. You can also use warm water baths and blankets to speed up the warming process.

Nothing seems to function quite as well when it's really cold, and horses are no exception. Hypothermia or dehydration-induced colic episodes are common occurrences for horses living in winter climates. The good news is that with a few management and husbandry changes, these episodes should occur to a lesser degree and with far less frequency.

Inspiration

Know your horse, especially before you try to push the envelope if you ever do. Take it slow until you know your horse is ready both physically and mentally. That means bones and tendons, not just heart rate recoveries. Your horse will "feel" ready way before bones and tendons really are. You also need to keep in mind that horses are unpredictable, and you never really are in complete control. Heed any subtle sign that something isn't quite right. Especially during an endurance ride. Gut instincts are usually right. **Julie Barnfarther**

When I think of winners in our sport, I do not think of the horse that lashes brilliantly across our endurance skies for a couple of years and then we hear of no longer, but the horse who comes back year after year with great performances. The name of our sport is "endurance" and that means longevity on the trail. I hear people say they are "not into the mileage thing." I am. **Julie Suhr**

Early in Chris' career, Courtney Hart posed a question: are you interested in this horse as a competitor who could be used up in a few years or as a companion who will continue to be a part of your life for many years. Though I felt attracted to competition, I realized that I enjoyed riding this particular horse so much that companionship was more important to me. That distinction between competitor vs. companion has guided all my subsequent decisions regarding Chris and has motivated me to have his welfare as my first priority. I have blundered in a variety of ways with him. I've tried to learn from my mistake and have seldom repeated the same mistake, just made new ones. If you cherish your horse and focus on making every ride mutually enjoyable, you will both benefit. I try to ride in a mindful fashion, focusing on what my horse and I are experiencing, making sure my horse is enjoying the work, and try to resist the impulse to let adrenaline fog my judgment.. **Karen Schwartz**

Almost every ride has at least one surprise waiting for you (good or bad). If you go out to have fun, you are rarely disappointed, and if you place well, it is icing on the cake. When you take time to understand your horse, they will make you a better person. The world is much more exciting when you are riding your horse, so don't sweat the small stuff in life; your horse already knows that, and that's what makes them such great partners. Maintaining your health so you can ride produces big rewards in all other aspects of your life. Never be in such a hurry on the trail that you cannot offer help to another rider in need. You don't have to ride fast all the time, but you should ride smart. HAVE FUN! Don't be in such a hurry, but do get to know you horse's personality, their strengths and weaknesses, as soon as you can. Once you understand each other, you can really start working together. Keep things simple, from your feeding to your training routines. They really like consistency in their lives, just like we do. Don't be swayed by the latest fad in tack, nutrition or training methods. Research them all and find what is best for your team—spending a lot of money doesn't translate into "the best" for your horse either. Read books, go to clinics, talk to some veterans, then evaluate YOUR horse and your goals and find a plan for yourself. I have learned so

much at every ride and observing others. When we first started, my crew—loving husband Dan—would follow veteran riders around to see what they were doing at the vet checks. I was appalled the first time I saw a sloppy bran mash, but if Rio was having that, then Ami would too. Ask a veteran a question and you will usually get a ton of information **Linda Cox**

Start behind the pack and ride at your own pace. Keep riding at your own pace and make sure your horse is not being carried on by other horses. Listen to your horse instead of your friends and coaches. Don't depend on others to evaluate the condition of your horse. If you have to depend on others to tell you what condition your horse is in you have no business racing. Keep riding slow until you can answer all the questions for yourself.

The fine line between life and death for your horse is an extremely fine one. An astute rider will get a feeling from the horse long before any outside person, like a veterinarian, could ever hope to. Pay attention to what the horse is telling you and don't ride past your horses capabilities. Don't even think about testing the limits until you have the experience to know the answer to all of the questions yourself. **David Nicholson, DVM**

Removing Mud Stains During Winter

By the Editors of EQUUS magazine

When it's too cold for a bath, try these tips for removing mud and manure stains from your horse's coat.

Mud and manure stains on your horse's coat are never easy to get out, but when winter weather makes a full bath impossible, the chore is even more challenging. Stains don't present a health hazard, but if your competition schedule or sense of aesthetics compels you to address them, try these tactics:

Keeping a horse, particularly a gray one, clean during winter calls for some creative stain-removal tricks. ©Kate Light

• Rub white vinegar directly onto the stains with a clean towel, then wipe it off. This also works on manes and tails tinged with urine or manure. For stubborn spots, you may need to repeat the process a couple of times.

• Use baby wipes to gently scrub away small stains around sensitive areas like the eyes, ears, nose and dock.

• Opt for a dry shampoo for larger body stains. Most are sprayed directly onto the coat and rubbed in with a towel, against the grain of the hair.

• For a deeper cleaning, steam away stains with hot towels. First, use a submersible heating element or a portable kettle to warm a bucket of water. You'll know the temperature is right if you can just stand to dip your gloved hand into it. While the water is heating, vigorously curry your horse's coat and use a dry shampoo to pretreat stubborn grass or manure marks. When the water is ready, dunk large bath towels into the bucket and wring out the excess moisture, leaving the towels damp but not dripping. Rapidly rub the stains in a circular motion. Continue to wet and rotate to clean parts of the towel as it lifts dirt. Use a smaller hand towel for the face. If your horse is damp from the towel treatment, cover him with a cooler to prevent chill.

Hay Feeders Uncovered

by: Karen Briggs • December 01 2009 • Article # 15459

Is there a better way to offer hay to horses? There are dozens, as it turns out, each with its own advantages.

In most parts of the world, pasture is, at best, a seasonal thing. For a good chunk of the year, most of us who are feeding horses have to replace green grass with the dried variety.

Hay, as we all know, is both bulky and vulnerable to the weather. It's also not inexpensive, even if you grow your own. So it's little wonder that humans, in their unflagging drive to build the better mousetrap, are constantly coming up with better ways to feed hay, both indoors and out.

There are certainly arguments in favor of feeding hay on the ground and letting the horses have at it. Feeding from the ground allows horses to eat in the posture for which they were designed, with their heads down. This minimizes the amount of dust and mold spores they inhale from their forage, and it allows their respiratory passages to drain each time they lower their heads.

But there are disadvantages to feeding this way as well. First and foremost, there's the matter of wastage. Particularly when you feed hay in a communal turnout situation, nearly as much might be trampled as eaten. Outside horses also tend to use strewn hay as a mattress rather than sustenance when the ground is wet or chilly.

Secondly, hay exposed to rain and snow tends to become unacceptably moldy, which makes it both unpalatable and unheal-thy to the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts. Hay served indoors in individual stalls might not suffer this problem, but it can easily become polluted with manure and urine to similar effect.

Hence the popularity of hay feeders, which are designed to keep hay off the ground and sheltered from the elements to reduce wastage.

It's a simple idea, but some hay feeders accomplish these goals better than others.

Outdoor Feeders

A good outdoor hay feeder, whether it is designed to accommodate large round bales of hay or flakes from a rectangular bale, should meet a number of objectives:

- It should be sturdy and safe, with no sharp edges, openings that could trap a foot, or overhead bars where a horse could bash his head or rub his mane;
- It should offer hay so that horses can eat with a "normal" posture instead of craning their heads and necks at strange angles;
- It should keep the hay contained to reduce wastage;
- It should be designed so a group of horses can feed safely while minimizing squabbles;
- It should be relatively portable (with a tractor) while remaining solid enough that horses can't shift it or tip it over;
- It should be easy to clean; and
- It should (ideally) protect the hay from rain and snow above, and water seeping from wet ground below.

Safety is the No. 1 concern when it comes to hay feeders. Says Rebecca Baird, a horse owner in Aiken, S.C., "As a general rule, I don't like hay feeders because of the possibility of heads and legs getting caught in them. I used to work as a night nurse in an equine hospital, and I have seen fatal injuries from both types of incidents. That's not to say that millions of people don't use them safely, but I will never be able to forget the horses I cared for who died because of hay feeder accidents.

"I don't like anything that has spaces large enough for hooves to fit through, and I don't like things with defined 'head spaces' either," she adds.

Traditional hay racks, similar to those used for cattle and sheep, were designed with a large V-shaped metal grill into which hay was thrown, and sometimes a tray underneath to catch leaf-shatter and/or to offer grain. They had the advantage of a grill placed high enough that it was unlikely for a horse to trap a hoof between the bars, but the downside was that dust particles tended to rain down into eyes and nostrils as the horse ate. This type of hay rack has fallen out of favor among horse owners as better designs have become available.

One of the simplest is a metal ring that is placed around a round bale of hay. It does nothing to get hay up off the ground (al-though that can be aided by placing a wooden pallet in the center before plunking down the round bale), but the ring does limit the amount of hay that horses can drag out and trample. Most of these feeders are made in three or four sections held together with pins, making them relatively easy to open, close, move, and store. But one should be careful to choose a design that is safe for horses.

Round bale ring feeders intended for cattle usually have openings through which the slow-moving ruminants insert their heads, but reactionary equines can easily do themselves a head injury on the upper bar if they pull back quickly. Much safer is the "tombstone" style round bale feeder designed for horses; it has no overhead bars. They are available for a few hundred dollars from farm supply stores.

Another simple design is the "Big Bale Buddy" (bigbalebuddy.com), which is a durable 1500-denier woven polypropylene cover for round bales. Although it can be a bit of a struggle pulling the cover on the bale (particularly if you have only one set of hands on duty), the Big Bale Buddy limits wastage, keeps the bale clean and dry, and has no sharp edges or rigid surfaces on which a horse could hurt himself. Elastic at both ends allows you to gradually peel back the cover as the bale gets eaten, and the Canadian manufacturers claim the material is rot-, stain-, and UV-resistant, and that it will remain flexible even in extreme cold. It's also fairly inexpensive, running in the $90-100 range, depending on size.

Eventer Jennifer Sullivan-Holder, of Midland, N.C., says, "The Bale Buddies are nice for pastures where I want to be able to move the round bales more often, and to which I have easy access with the Bobcat. It's a little more time- and labor-intensive to put the wrap around the bale, flip it back over to pull it up, and so forth, but I like the fact that there are no sharp edges."

Another Canadian design that gets rave reviews from horse owners is the Duplessis hay feeder (duplessishorsefeeder.com). Resembling a child's plastic playhouse, the Duplessis feeder is essentially a rectangular "hut" that can be placed over a round bale to shield it from weather. Eight large oval "windows" in the Duplessis cover allow horses access to the hay within. The manufacturers claim using the feeder can reduce wastage by up to 30%.

"I am on my third season with two of the Duplessis 'hay domes' and think they are the greatest," says owner Melanie Hughes of Niagara Falls, Ontario. "There is very little waste, and the horses clean every bit of hay right up because it is kept covered and doesn't get spoiled by the weather.

"They are easy to flip over and back up again over the large round bales, and they can be easily moved by hand or tractor," Hughes adds.

Taking into account the habits of local wildlife is important when choosing a feeder. A Texas owner points out that any feeder that is low to the ground can provide a cozy hiding place for rattlesnakes. Sooner or later a horse could get bitten. Where ve-nomous snakes are an issue, she says, owners should feed on the ground, or high off the ground with open space below.

The "hay basket," another relatively new hay feeding design, would fill the bill in such locales. It consists of a round metal frame, within which rests a removable plastic basket with large slats for drainage. The plastic basket is suspended off the ground so hay will not soak in moisture or get trampled, and the metal frame can be easily rolled from location to location. While it will not accommodate a round bale, the hay basket will easily hold several rectangular bales' worth of flakes to keep a small herd going for a few days.

"I'm very happy with the hay basket I bought earlier this year for feeding square bales," says Kathy Viele, an owner in Easton, Kan. "I keep hay in front of my three Thoroughbreds 24/7 without it getting spoiled or trampled into the ground. It's very easy for one person to move around, but stable and safe for the horses. It keeps hay off the ground, but lets the horses eat with a natural head position. Plus there's nowhere for a hoof to get caught. With the slats in the basket, it doesn't matter if the hay gets rained on, as it drains well."

The Slow Hay Movement

Indoors, it's far more likely that you'll just toss a few flakes of hay in the corner of the stall than use a feeder; the overhead racks once in common usage are *persona non grata* in most modern barns because they tended to dump dust into horses' eyes, ears, and nostrils, and they could easily trap the hoof of a rambunctious animal indulging in a bit of indoor ballet.

Some owners, however, prefer using a haynet on the theory that it cuts down on wastage. But haynets need to be hung quite high, because as they empty they tend to droop and could also become a potential trap for hooves. Same end problem: hay suspended overhead dumps dust particles where they can do the most harm.

Recently, there has been a trend towards "slow feeding" by using haynets with much smaller openings than the traditional nylon kind. Proponents say that just as appreciating your food slowly is healthier than gulping down something from a fast-food joint, using a fine-mesh feeder to offer hay slows horses down, encourages them to chew each mouthful more thoroughly, reduces the risk of obesity (an important consideration for metabolically efficient breeds and for any horse diagnosed as insulin-resistant), and makes hay last much longer with almost zero wastage. Using slow feeding, a single flake might entertain a horse for three or four times as long as it would if it were offered sans the fine mesh.

Creativity seems to be the hallmark of the slow feeding movement, with owners successfully recycling everything from tennis nets to hockey goal netting. Some have even employed twine or cotton string to weave their own fine-mesh haynets, calling upon macramé skills honed in the 1970s.

"I swear by my small-mesh haynets," says Talla Chiodo, who breeds silver dapple Paints at her Silver Spring Farm in Ankeny, Iowa. "They drastically cut down on the amount of wasted hay, and they slow eating so each horse is occupied longer."

Manufacturers have also gotten on the bandwagon. One company with "slow feeding" designs for indoor/outdoor use is Thin Air Canvas Inc., makers of the NibbleNet (thinaircanvas.com/nibblenet/nibblenetframe.htm). These fine-mesh hay bags are made of webbing and waterproof heavy-duty vinyl. After filling the net with hay, snap it to a solid surface for easy access. The company suggests you make a simple plywood platform for horizontal access, but you can also suspend it from a tree, sturdy post, or the stall wall.

You might choose to build a "grazing feeder," storing hay behind a horizontal or vertical steel grid with 2-by-2-inch openings. A simple wooden box can suffice, with an opening for adding hay and a method for sliding out the metal grid for cleaning. These feeders provide a similar slow feeding effect, but, if solidly built, they might be safer than a soft haynet-style feeder for horses who are shod (shoe heels could conceivably get caught in a fine-mesh haynet, with panic ensuing).

Take-Home Message

Consider your horse's personality and environment when deciding on the perfect hay feeding scenario. If you choose to use a hay feeder, make sure you pick one that not only makes your life simpler and makes your hay go further, but also one that is safe for your animals.

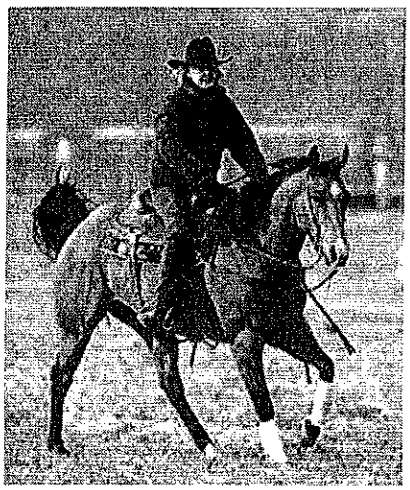
Horse Activities - Calories burned per hour:

ACTIVITY:	For 130 lb person:	For 155 lb person:	For 190 lb person:
Shoveling	354 cal/hr	422 cal/hr	518 cal/hr
General Horse Riding:	236 cal/hr	281 cal/hr	345 cal/hr
Riding horse at the walk:	148 cal/hr	176 cal/hr	216 cal/hr
Riding horse at the trot:	384 cal/hr	457 cal/hr	561 cal/hr
Riding horse at a gallop:	472 cal/hr	563 cal/hr	690 cal/hr
Horse Grooming	354 cal/hr	422 cal/hr	518 cal/hr
Baling hay/cleaning barn:	472 cal/hr	563 cal/hr	690 cal/hr
Shoveling Grain	325 cal/hr	387 cal/hr	474 cal/hr
Fencing	354 cal/hr	422 cal/hr	518 cal/hr
Polo	472 cal/hr	563 cal/hr	690 cal/hr
Hiking, cross country (if your horse is hard to catch...)	354 cal/hr	422 cal/hr	518 cal/hr
Brisk walking 4 MPH	236 cal/hr	281 cal/hr	345 cal/hr
Walking, carrying 15 lb load:	207 cal/hr	246 cal/hr	302 cal/hr

Warm Up to Winter Riding

By Debbie Moors

It's not always the easiest time to ride, but you can beat the cold-weather blahs with some of these tips and strategies for winter riding.



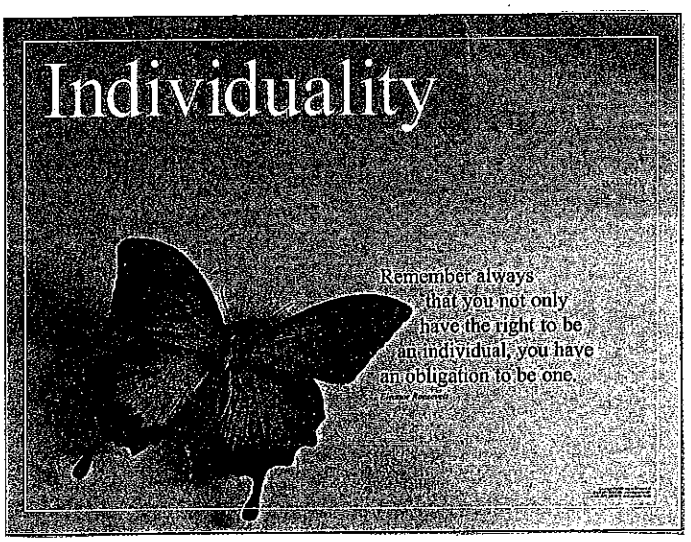
Ride through winter in comfort with a few simple tips for staying warm.
Photo by Darrell Dodds

If you live in a cold weather climate, you know how challenging riding through winter can be. Here are a few tips for taking the chill off barn and riding time.

1. Wear layers. Before you head out to the barn, know whether you're just going out to feed and check on the horses, or if you'll be riding. If you're not doing strenuous barn chores or schooling your horse, wear heavier clothes. And, if you are going to be getting your heart rate up and working hard, dress in layers.

Wear a light-weight base layer that'll wick sweat away from your skin (polypropalene or silk are two options) then follow that with a middle layer of wool, or a synthetic that insulates without adding a lot of bulk. A jacket system that has a zip-in vest or jacket offers even more options.

2. If you'll be trail riding, pack a small waterproof container or ziplock bag that has matches, an extra layer of warmth and a "space blanket." Boating supply companies offer small kits that are waterproof and crush proof, and can usually be slipped into a saddlebag or fanny pack.



3. Warm up. A good grooming session before you ride will warm you up and will help warm your horse's muscles, too.

4. During your grooming routine, check your horse's hooves for snow or ice if he's been outdoors. Pick out his feet, then spritz with cooking spray or coat with Vaseline to keep snow and ice from packing into his feet.

5. While you groom your horse, wear your horse's bridle under your jacket to help warm the bit, or wrap it in gel hand warmers. Or, check out The Bitten Store's bit warmer--which'll double as a body warmer or can slip into your pocket as a hand warmer.

6. Plan extra time to cool your horse down after a ride. If your horse is clipped, consider using a quarter sheet--it'll drape over his hindquarters and keep him a little warmer during cold-day rides.

7. If you wear insulated boots, make sure you're able to move them easily in the stirrups. Consider ordering over-sized stirrups for use during the winter months. Try gel-pack foot warmers to protect against popsicle toes.

8. Take time to stretch and warm your muscles before climbing into the saddle. And give your horse plenty of time to warm up before you start a strenuous schooling session.

9. If you're going on a long ride, wear a Camelbak (drink delivery system that you wear like a backpack) or similar product to carry water. It's easy to get dehydrated in the winter, and dehydration makes you more susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite.

10. Water is a concern for your horse, too. Studies show that when they're offered warm water, horse's will drink more in the winter than if their water is ice cold. Keep an eye on water tanks and buckets (make sure they're clean and ice-free). Decreased water intake can increase risk for colic.

11. On really cold days, take a riding break. Check in on your horse, then grab your tack and head to a warm tack room, or your house, and do a little cold-day cleaning. Wash bits (Listerine makes a great bit cleaner and disinfectant), clean headstalls and saddles, and check for any worn leather or broken buckles.

12. Do a safety check. Walk through the barn and pasture, checking for ice and hazards. Mix sawdust and de-icer to both melt ice and absorb moisture, and double-check water lines when frigid temps are predicted.

13. Visualize summer. Sometimes, staying motivated requires goal setting. Think about goals for yourself and your horse, plan to attend some winter clinics and horse expos, and make a month-by-month list of what you'll do to make your goals come true.

14. Enjoy your horse. Even if you only have time for a deep whiff of eau d'equine or you just sit and listen to barn noises for awhile, it can help recharge your batteries for that next sparkling winter day, when winter riding is at its best.