

riding, training, horsekeeping **hoofbeats**

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the starting box
with stuart tinney
mounting stress
sarcoids
on the bit
with richard weis
soft and simple
with anky and sjef



inside: equitana and horse property care

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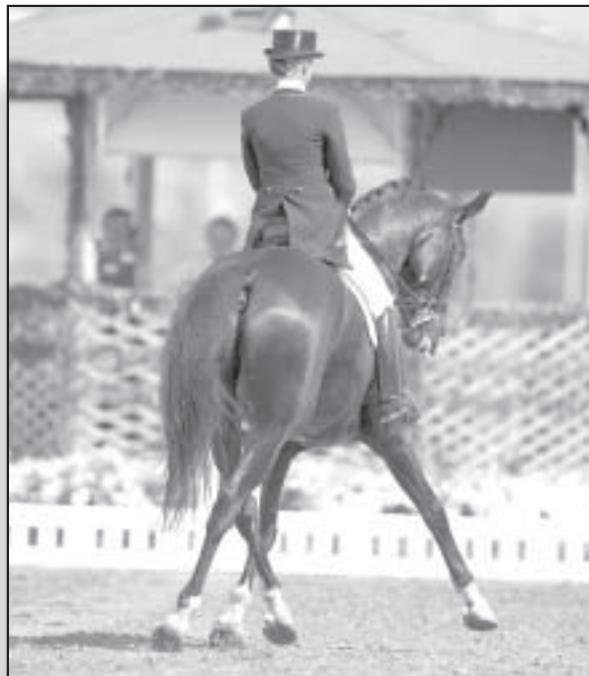
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New and existing subscribers can enter their details in the subscriber's competition to **win** 10 bags of Mitavite and a Mitavite merchandise hamper.

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EDITORIAL

It's one thing to have a nice picture of yourself published in the magazine, but it can be another issue altogether if that picture happens to show you or your horse in an unfortunate position. To illustrate a point in an article we often require 'unfortunate' or bad positions, so we would like to acknowledge and thank the many who volunteer to be 'models' for these photos. Because it often seems to be a last minute panic to get the photos we need, we have developed a group of 'models' in close proximity to the office, who gamely and cheerfully give up their time to pose for anything from an incorrect position, smacking their horse with a whip, to the not so flattering 'rear' images for the mounting stress article. Readers are also a great help in the picture department and we have had some great photos come through.

We've always known that horses and properties are a great form of relaxation and stress release, (even though at times it may seem otherwise) and now there is even a branch of psychology that proves it! Ecopsychology is the keyword for the simple fact that contact with nature is good for us and may even be a form of preventative medicine. Proponents of ecopsychology say indications are that nature can help us recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, have an 'immunising' effect by protecting us from future stresses, and help us to concentrate and think more clearly. More good reasons to get out there and enjoy our horses...

Ever mindful of keeping our readers happy and well informed, we go to great lengths every issue to bring you good stories - our article 'Keep It Simple, Keep It Soft' is one such example which entailed Karen speaking with Sjef whilst he was taking his annual holiday on the beach in Spain, with Anky and his young son. This was after several false starts, including one call at 11pm 'our' time to catch him at a time that suited, so we thank Sjef and Anky for taking time out from their holiday for this article.

Our other contributors are also good to us, going above and beyond the call of duty with their input and research, and always available for last minute discussions, suggestions or changes. We are privileged to work with many of the top riders, trainers, scientists, veterinarians and experts, which allows us to present up to date and informative information to you.

If you have contacted the office recently and wondered why we all seem a little more 'frazzled' than usual, it's because this edition is a bumper one - in fact the biggest issue yet. As well, we have been busy working on the Dec/Jan magazine as Equitana falls right in the middle of production time...and we don't want to be completing the last few pages in the airport departure lounge. While there will be many major draw cards at Equitana, including Anky and others featured in this issue, we hope you will make the time to come and visit the Hoofbeats Stand where Sandy, Tracy and Carol will be keen to meet readers, contributors and advertisers, show off the goodies in the jam packed Hoofbeats Mag Bag, and show case the hilarious new Equine Escapades 2006 calendar, which is sure to be a hit.

See you there...*the hoofbeats team*.

COVER: Olympic Gold medallist Stuart Tinney training Tallyho Sambubca, in preparation for the Lakes and Craters Int. 3DE in December.

*Photo courtesy Stuart and Karen Tinney
Anky van Grunsven photo by Julie Wilson*

Saddle change? Or Gullet change?

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choice is
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So, Saddle change...or Gullet change?

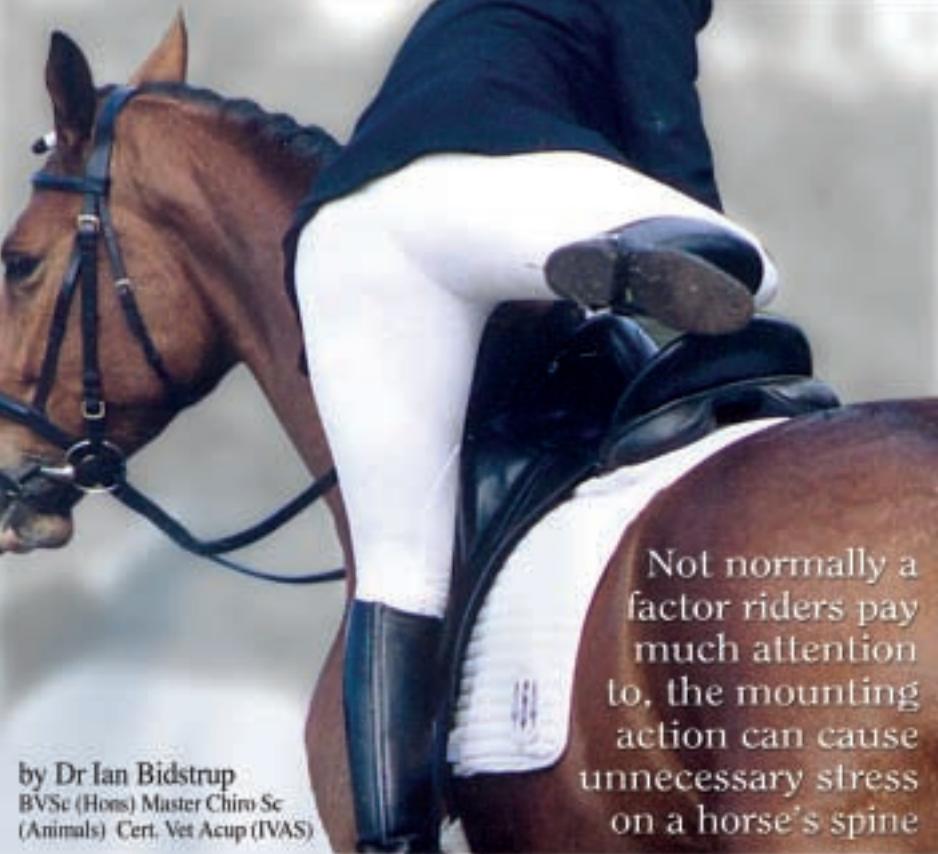
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MOUNTING STRESS



Not normally a factor riders pay much attention to, the mounting action can cause unnecessary stress on a horse's spine

by Dr Ian Bidstrup
BVSc (Hons) Master Chiro Sc
(Animals) Cert. Vet Acup (IVAS)

A side from taking care not to poke the girth area with the toe of a boot and attempting to spring off the ground with some degree of athleticism (just in case anyone is watching!), most riders probably don't devote much thought to the mounting process. Yet the influence this action has on a horse's body is something that deserves closer scrutiny, especially when the amount of stress and discomfort it can cause is easily reduced by following some simple guidelines.

Weight On The Wither

When a horse is mounted from the ground, a great deal of force impacts on the wither - starting from when the rider first puts their weight into the near side stirrup to launch into the saddle. This action results in a 'reefing' motion being applied to the off-side of the wither that, when coupled with a 'dragging' effect on the girth - particularly on the near side - twists the ribcage and spine. Pressure is also created in the upper chest, while the vertebral joints in the wither tend to 'jam up', compressing the ribs and muscles under the girth on the near side. In addition, the point of the saddle tree and the stirrup bar press hard into the wither muscles on the off side, causing further discomfort and even bruising in the wither area.

For a fit and muscular horse that is free of spinal problems - including saddle soreness - being mounted from the ground by most riders shouldn't be much of an issue in terms of their body being able to cope with the twisting action on the spine. Unfortunately, however, the sad reality is that most horses suffer from pain in the wither area, many also sustaining muscle and spinal damage due to incorrectly placed or unsuitably shaped saddles. Due to this, it is probably fair to say that mounting from the ground causes some discomfort to the majority of horses - regardless of whether or not they show any signs of pain.

Mounting Stress continued...

Girthiness

Abnormal girth sensitivity or ‘girthiness’, which research has indicated is a very common condition amongst performance horses, features highly sensitive or painful areas under the girth, over the wither and in the back of the ribcage under the saddle seat. During mounting, there is the potential to unwittingly hurt all three of these already ‘touchy’ body parts - the wither and girth when weight is put into the stirrup and the back of the ribcage as the rider’s weight is swung upwards and lands in the saddle. A poorly shaped or fitted saddle that causes pressure areas through being too narrow, too wide or placed too far forward only serves to compound the stress on these critical points, further irritating any pre-existing spinal problems or sensitivities the horse may have.



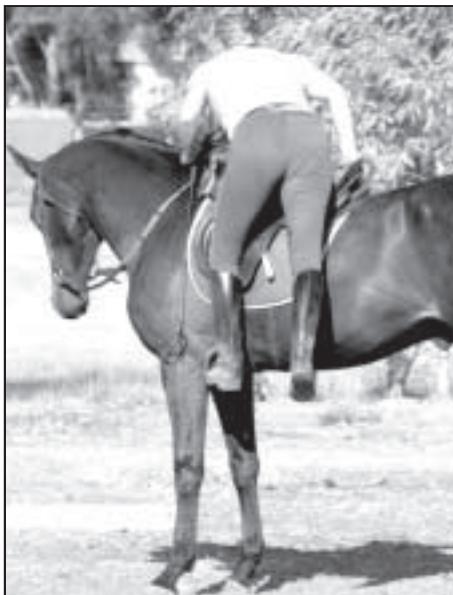
Left: Abnormal girth sensitivity features highly sensitive or painful areas under the girth, over the withers and in the back of the ribcage under the saddle seat.

Below left: The main requirement for a mounting block is that it is sturdy and safe for horse and rider.

Centre: A crate is easily transported and can also be used as storage at a show but a piece of plywood wired on the bottom will give it stability.

Right: As the rider mounts, the saddle is twisted, causing stress on the horse's wither, ribcage and spine, especially when riders 'drag' themselves up instead of 'swinging' up.

Below: Mounting from the ground can have an adverse affect on both horse and rider.



Rider Style

But it doesn’t stop there. The style a rider uses - in terms of where they stand, the way in which they position their hands and the means whereby they arrive in the saddle - can all play a part in determining whether the mounting process becomes an experience the horse associates with discomfort.

The traditional method of standing next to the shoulder facing backwards, placing the foot closest to the horse in the stirrup, grasping the saddle with both hands and ‘swinging’ upwards in a continuous motion can be made considerably less stressful by paying attention to a few small details. Contrary to what some riders have been taught, mounting by gripping the pommel with both hands actually increases the twisting effect they are applying - not to mention being very awkward for the vertically challenged and less than flexible! Grasping the cantle of the saddle with one hand is also not recommended, as the further backwards this hand is in relation to the stirrup bars and the girth, the greater the leverage force being generated. Instead, using mounting from the near side as an example, gripping the pommel with the left hand and just behind the flap of the off side with the right is the best combination for reducing stress both on the saddle tree and the horse’s spine.

The ability to swing oneself upwards in a continuous arc relies heavily on a pivot action around the foot in the stirrup, the left if mounting on the near side. Only placing

40-50cm is ideal, with the design being such that there are no sharp corners or materials a horse could potentially injure themselves on. The commonly used milk crate is not a good choice as not only are they not high enough but they often have sharp edges, will tip or get knocked over easily and can collapse under the weight of a person - especially if the material it is made from has been weakened by being left out in the sun and rain. If there is no alternative, however, wiring a square of 5-ply wood securely to the top of the crate is a way of strengthening and stabilising it to some extent.

Less Stress For All!

Mounting stress is not a phenomena that applies only to the horse, as the act of swinging oneself up from the ground to what may be a great height also places considerable strain on the body of the rider! This is because the movement required involves subjecting our own spinal discs and vertebrae to a twisting force, which should be avoided where possible if the risk of future back problems is to be minimised.

The healthiest and safest approach to mounting for both horse and rider, therefore, is to use a mounting block constructed from strong yet lightweight material - making it possible to move around easily when required. A stable platform with one or two steps and an overall height of approximately



Mounting on an alternating basis from the off side will help relieve pressures.

the toe area, rather than most of the foot, in the stirrup iron allows this pivoting movement to happen more readily - ultimately meaning that there is less need to pull downwards on the saddle to compensate for a lack of momentum. Again, if lack of flexibility and/or a height disadvantage mean that it's a struggle just to get a foot up somewhere near the stirrup - let alone worry about the subtlety of its positioning - letting the leather down as many holes as necessary to mount without straining will considerably reduce the torsion effect on the horse's spine. Only using the ball of the foot in the stirrup also

reduces the chance of poking unnecessarily at the sensitive girth region - which can, in itself, set off the undesirable chain reaction of the muscle tension and vertebral 'jamming' associated with mounting stress.

As for variations on the traditional way of mounting, the alternative of facing forwards and, if standing on the near side, putting the left foot in the stirrup is much less favourable for the horse than the 'facing backwards' method. This is not so much due to what is happening in the rider's upward 'swing' phase but more to the 'thump' with which their weight first arrives in the stirrup from what, for most people, is an awkward starting point.

For the more athletic, the good news is that vaulting on is an acceptable way of practically eliminating the twisting effect on the horse's spine - providing that the landing in the saddle occurs at the peak of the rider's jump, ensuring a light touch down in the saddle. 'Legging up' can give a similar light and stress-free result so is perhaps a more realistic option for most, although not always practical.

If you simply can't bear the thought of radically changing your mounting style to incorporate some or all of these suggestions, at least consider making a conscious decision



The left hand on the pommel and the right hand just behind the flap of the off side, is the best combination for reducing stress on both the saddle tree and the horse's spine.

to mount from either side on an alternating basis, rather than always mounting from the near side - a human trait that effectively means the most sensitive of the two sides of the horse is conveniently avoided.

About The Author - Ian Bidstrup

A qualified veterinarian with a Masters degree in Chiropractic Science (Animals), Ian Bidstrup's recent studies in the areas of veterinary chiropractic and acupuncture have given him a different perspective and greater sensitivity to some of the daily stresses - such as mounting incorrectly - that riders unwittingly put on their horses.

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