

PREPARING YOUR POLOCROSSE HORSE

The right preparation is essential if you want to get the most from your polocrosse horse throughout the playing season.

This guide outlines an effective preparation schedule, designed to maintain your horses' health, condition and fitness from the day you bring him into work, at least 8 weeks before the first carnival, until the end of the season.

TOPICS

1. Drenching
2. Teeth
3. Shoeing
4. Chiropractic
5. Equipment
6. Clipping
7. Rugging
8. Feeding
9. Work program
10. Float travel
11. Carnival care

1. DRENCHING

When your horse is brought into work the first essential thing is to drench him. Make sure your horse is drenched for bots as well as worms. Paste drenches are usually sufficient. If you have any problems consult a vet.

2. TEETH

Poorly maintained teeth lead to a wide range of problems.

If your horse's teeth are not filed properly, wolf teeth, sharp edges and uneven molars can result in the horse not being able to eat properly. Sharp points on the outside of the top teeth will cause severe lacerations to the inside of the horse's mouth when ridden. This will cause control and steering problems because the horse will be in considerable pain.

It is essential to have a qualified equine dentist attend to your horse before you start riding. This usually only needs doing once a year.

3. SHOEING

Horses need to be shod every 5 to 6 weeks.

Shoes left on longer will cause problems such as corns under the heels and cracking of the hoof walls. Long toes put excess pressure on tendons and ligaments. Injury to either of these means the end of the season for the horse.

Concave shoes are the only type of shoe suitable for polocrosse. The shape of the shoe helps the horse grip on slippery ground.

4. CHIROPRACTIC

Your horse will perform much better if he is pain free.

After several weeks of work it is a good idea to have your horse checked by an experienced and reputable equine chiropractor. Ideally you should have your horse checked regularly.

5. EQUIPMENT

Saddle

The saddle must fit the horse correctly. It must not be too wide in the gullet because this will rub the wither. The felt or lining must not have hard lumps in it. If your horse develops a sore back it will require time without riding to allow it to heal.

Bridle and breastplate

These must be a comfortable fit. Well-maintained leather is better than plastic as it will not rub or scald as much.

Reins

Rule 27e states that reins must not be split and can be no longer than 1.6 metres (5ft. 6ins). Cotton reins are less likely to slip when wet than nylon or leather reins.

Bits

Sweet mouth bits in various thicknesses are available in most saddleries.

Severe bits, such as thin twisted wire bits, usually cause cuts and bleeding in the horse's mouth, which will become a welfare issue. If this occurs, your horse can be sent off and not allowed play for 15 days (rule 3c).

Saddlecloth

Foam approximately 25mm thick covered with cotton or woolen material is good for the horse's back. Nylon should not be used because it cannot absorb sweat and can cause scalding.

Bandages

It is important not to put the bandages on too tight.

The most economical and efficient way to bandage your horse is to use a thin cotton covered foam pad covered by a medium stretch nylon bandage. The pad will absorb the sweat. Using two strips of electrical tape, one near the top and the other near the bottom, will help keep them on.

Bell boots

Rubber bell boots are lighter and less bulky than ones made from other materials and are therefore more efficient.

Whips

Whips must comply with the specifications in the Rulebook.

Spurs

If you cut your horse with spurs you will be required to remove them for the weekend and you risk possible team disqualification if rule 43c is not obeyed.

Spurs with a short shank and short blunt points on the rowels are the least likely to cut your horse.

6. CLIPPING

Clipping is essential because it helps horses hold their condition; nutrition from their feed is not wasted on maintaining a hairy coat. It also helps a horse to dry quickly after it has been hosed down and scraped.

To keep the coat in good condition, every time your horse sweats, hose down, scrape, dry off and rug well.

Horses played in winter months need to be clipped for their health and well-being and most horses need to be re-clipped in the middle of the season.

7. RUGGING

A cold horse will lose condition because it uses too much energy trying to keep warm. The coat will also look dull and dried out.

Clipped horses need at least 2 heavy rugs and a heavy wool-lined neck rug. If nylon rugs are used they should be heavy quality and some type of cotton or wool under-rug should be used.

Rule of Thumb – If you are cold your horse probably needs another rug. If you are very hot, he will be too.

Make sure your rugs fit well i.e. do not slip back over the wither, where they can cause rubbing and sores.

8. FEEDING

Grain or equivalent

All polocrosse horses need a high energy feed i.e. a grain mix or equivalent.

Start with a small amount when your horse first comes in and increase as work and fitness increases. Feeds with 12% protein content seem to be sufficient for most horses. Most horses playing B grade or lower usually do not need more than 1 kilo of grain per feed at their peak fitness.

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are the most important additive used. They help avoid dehydration, which can result in "tying-up" and other muscle problems. Even though some feeds claim to have electrolytes in them, it is still a good idea to use more.

Bran and Pollard

These used in small amounts (½ litre) once a day helps make feeds more palatable and easier to digest. These ingredients MUST be damp, not dry.

Supplements

Minerals and some vitamin supplements can be beneficial, particularly if chaff and hay are not of the best quality. Most prepared feeds already include these e.g. mitavite feeds.

Chaff

Lucerne chaff, because it is high protein, is best with a small amount of white chaff i.e. wheaten or oaten. After you have placed the grain etc. in a 20 litre bucket, fill it with lucerne chaff.

Hay

Horses need plenty of bulk to maintain good condition over a full season. At least 1 good biscuit of lucerne hay should be fed each day. If your horse does not have access to grass it will probably need 2 biscuits per day.

If you feel your horse does not look as well as it should, ask advice from someone whose horses always look in very good condition. This person may not necessarily be an A grader, but rather someone who just knows how to look after their horses.

9. WORK PROGRAM

Polocrosse horses need at least 8 weeks work before their first carnival.

Start slowly, especially if your horse is fat, and increase the amount of work over the first 4 weeks. Trot and canter at a medium speed and slightly collected.

Week	Activity
1	Trot 15 minutes, building to 25 minutes
2	Trot 15 minutes, canter 15 minutes
3 & 4	Trot 10 minutes, canter 20 minutes
5 & 6	Trot 5 minutes, canter 25 minutes
7 & 8	Trot 5 minutes, canter 25 minutes, add some sprint work 3 days a week.

Each sprint day do 3 x 100 metre sprints 5 minutes apart. Just walk between sprints.

If you attend regular practices, you probably only need to sprint once a week (Thursday). On sprint days, cut 10 minutes from your canter time.

On days you want to practise stick work, incorporate this into your canter time.

Work between carnivals

After a carnival, both you and your horse will benefit from having Monday off. If you are playing the same horse 2 carnivals in a row do not work him as hard through the week.

Day	Activity
Monday	Rest day
Tuesday	Trot 15 minutes, canter 5 minutes
Wednesday	Trot 10 minutes, canter 15 minutes
Thursday	Trot 5 minutes, canter 20 minutes
Friday	Very light work (especially if you're travelling a long distance to a carnival)

Once your horse is fit and playing competition they do not need to be worked as hard as early in the pre-season. There is no need for sprint work, carnivals are enough.

10. TRAVEL

No horse should travel on a truck or float for more than 4 hours at a time. After travelling so long with their heads tied up, horses need to get their heads down to help them clear their lungs, move around and urinate if necessary.

Horses travelling non-stop for extended times run the risk of colic and travel sickness, which can result in pneumonia and sometimes death.

Horses should always wear leg protection boots to guard against injury.

11. CARNIVAL CARE

Before play

Each horse should be walked and trotted around for 10 to 15 minutes to warm up properly. Then one quick short sprint and two turns each way to loosen muscles.

Between chukkas

The horse should be led around at a walk to keep warm and stop muscles from cramping. If it is cold throw a light rug over their back and rump.

Fresh water should be available, especially in hot weather.

Sponging a horse's head, neck and shoulders will help cool them between chukkas. Be sure to scrape water off because it will act as a barrier to keep heat in if not removed immediately.

Remount your horse several minutes before you start playing again. Slowly trot around before play recommences. This helps loosen up muscles again.

After the game

Cool your horse down by walking and trotting slowly for 10 minutes after the game, before removing gear and hosing down.

It is very important to scrape off all excess water so your horse can cool down properly. After the horse has dried apply a light rug. Then, when cool, add more rugs depending on weather conditions.

Injuries

If a horse has any kind of injury, whether a rubbed mouth or cuts and abrasions, it must be treated immediately the game has finished. Failure to do so will bring action from welfare officers.

Overnight

Horses must be put in yards overnight, not tied up. They must be well fed, well rugged and be given plenty of fresh water. Next morning, before feeding, it is a good idea to lead your horses around, especially if their legs are inclined to puff up overnight.

Take the grain out of Sunday night and Monday morning feeds after a carnival. Because he will have Monday off, removing the grain helps minimise the chances of "tying-up" on Tuesday.