



# Horsin' Around The Wabash Valley

Volume 1, Issue 4  
February 2009

President: Jeanne Lorenzo  
Vice Pres: Jeremy Ray

Secretary: Deborah Shahadey  
Treasurer: Jennette Shaker

## Upcoming Meetings:

- February 10 @ 7:00 pm  
(Sycamore Chevy)
- March 10 @ 7:00 pm  
(Sycamore Chevy)



Club website @  
[www.wvha.info](http://www.wvha.info)

- Show bills
- Meeting dates
- Forms
- Local Horses &  
Items 4 Sale
- Links of interest
- And more . . . .



## BACK IN THE GAME

### *Getting Your Horse Back in Barrel-Racing Shape After A Layoff*

#### **Before You Turn That First Barrel (A Summary):**

- Hotwalker or hand walking = two weeks
- Long-trotting in round pen or on longe line = one or two weeks
- Mounted walking = two weeks
- Mounted long trotting = two to three weeks
- Mounted loping = two to three weeks; then move gradually to controlled galloping for short stretches, and reintroduce work around barrels

#### **Success Tips:**

- Do *not* at any point rush your horse's conditioning. Advance slowly and monitor his progress carefully. Watch how he sweats and how he cools out, and check with your vet if anything concerns you, including soreness or lameness.
- Make sure your horse is properly shod (too-long hooves will put additional stress on his tendons and ligaments), and outfit him in protective wraps or boots whenever you work him.
- If you reduced your horse's feed while he was off work, increase his rations gradually and incrementally as you intensify his workload.
- Throughout his get-back-in-shape program, turn your horse out on pasture or in a large paddock area. (The extra space will keep his muscles limber and prevent stiffness.)

# SELECTING YOUR HORSE'S WINTER BLANKET

## CHOOSING THE CORRECT SIZE OF BLANKET

The fit of your blanket is extremely important in order to ensure the comfort of your horse and to prevent rubbing and slippage. The most important measurement to take into account is the length of the blanket required. This is measured as the distance from the center of the chest to the rear of the quarters where you expect the blanket to finish. It is also important to consider the build of your horse. A horse with a very big or stocky build will more than likely require a blanket larger than his length would indicate. Similarly, a finely built horse may require a size smaller. Taking these two factors into consideration will ensure that you are able to choose the best possible fit of blanket for your horse and thereby make sure that he is as comfortable as possible. It is important to also take into account that your horse will probably require one size larger for his turnout blanket than for his stable blanket. Most blankets are sized in two-inch or three-inch increments. This measurement refers to the distance from the center of the chest to the rear of the quarters where you expect the blanket to finish.

**FITTING YOUR BLANKET.** There are several things that you should look for to ensure that your blanket fits your horse well and comfortably:

**The withers** - it is essential that the blanket fit well up the neck and beyond the withers - to ensure that excessive pressure is not put either on the point of shoulder or directly on or behind the wither. A well-fitting blanket should lie about 2-4 inches in front of the withers.

**The shoulders** - the outside edge of the blanket should lie well in front of the shoulder to allow for free movement. Look for a blanket that fits extremely well around the neck. With a well fitting blanket, the top strap of the front fastening should be about in line with the point of shoulder. If this strap lies much above the point of shoulder, your horse's freedom to graze will be restricted. If the strap lies much below the point of shoulder, undue pressure will be put on his shoulders, which may cause rubbing.

Several blanket makers are now incorporating a new front closure system where the top strap instead of being horizontal is at an angle and lies along the groove between the horse's shoulder and neck. This "V" formation transfers the pressure above the point of shoulder, which lies between the straps. This maximizes the freedom of movement of the horse and also prevents rain from entering the front of the blanket.

**The rump** - 3 to 5 darts (depending on the type of the blanket) should be in place around the rear of the blanket to facilitate a snug fit over the rump. The end of the blanket, where the tail flap is attached, should finish just as the tail starts.

**The belly** - the blanket should be cut deep enough so that the belly is not visible under the blanket!

Look for turn-out blankets with cross-surcingles which provide a simple, effective non-slip design. The need for leg straps has vanished, and horses are now a lot more comfortable and safe in their turnout blankets.

The cross surcingles should be fitted so that they hang about 4 inches under the horse's belly. If they are fitted too tight, undue strain will be put on the blanket. If fitted too loose, the ability of the blanket to remain secure may be compromised.

It is important to check the tautness of the cross surcingles after a new blanket has been worn for a day or so. The blanket will inevitably "settle" onto the shape of your horse, and so adjustments may need to be made.

# Stretching Exercises for Your Horse

By Sue M. Copeland, Photos by Cappy Jackson

Use these quick and easy stretches from massage therapist Peter Atkins to increase your horse's under-saddle flexibility.

**The exercise:** Carrot stretches.

**The goal:** To increase the flexibility and range of motion in your horse's neck and back.

**Performance benefit:** You'll relax your horse's neck and back muscles, which will make them more supple, helping to reduce stiffness and resistance; you'll also help even up a one-sided horse.

**What you'll need:** A handful of carrots; a halter and lead rope.

**Frequency:** If your horse is stiff through his neck, perform the stretches every time you ride him for a month, or until you notice an increase in flexibility and suppleness. After that point, perform the exercises once a week. For maximum benefit, perform those stretches just before you ride.

**Before you begin:** Halter your horse, and ask him to stand squarely in an area with good, level footing.

**Step 1:** Positioned on your horse's left side, squat at a point off to the side and slightly behind his front leg, as shown. Break a carrot into a bite-size piece, then hold it to his mouth, gradually drawing down his head with the "bait" until his nose reaches a point level with and just behind his left front fetlock. Ask him to hold that position for 10 to 15 seconds, then give him the carrot piece as a reward. Repeat two to three times.



**Step 2:** Stand next to your horse's barrel. Using another carrot treat, ask him to bring his nose to his girth area, just behind his left elbow. Have him hold it there for 10 to 15 seconds, then feed him and release. Repeat two to three times. For added degree of difficulty, ask him to bring his nose to his withers and hold it there. This will be hard for him, so be patient, working him to that site gradually. Reward/release, then repeat each stretch on his right side.

**Step 3:** Squat next to your horse's left front leg. Hold a piece of carrot between his front legs, asking him to reach down to his fetlocks to fetch it as he stretches his neck and back, as shown. Hold for 10 to 12 seconds, reward, and repeat.



- *Horse & Rider*, February 2009

For massage-therapist Peter Atkins' performance-enhancing back-stretch exercises, see "Back Lift" in the September 2000 issue of *Horse & Rider*

## TIPS

- Watch your fingers to avoid an inadvertent bite.

- If your horse steps away from you with his hind legs, he's trying to get the carrot by swinging his front end toward it, rather than bending his body. That's because he's stiff, and the stretch is hard for him. Position him next to a stall or barn-aisle wall to block that evasion.

- If your horse has trouble reaching as far as you've asked him to, or holding that position, start with a lesser degree of stretch until his muscles relax and become more flexible.

- Look for differences in the angle of your horse's head as he reaches for the carrot on his right and left sides. He might tilt his head one way on his left side, and another way on his right side. That means he's stiffer on one side than the other. Move the carrot around, and up and down, getting him to chase the morsel until he bends easily on both sides.

- Be sure to make your horse hold the stretch for the described amount of time. If you were to let him simply reach around and snatch the carrot, you'd be negating the flexibility benefits of the exercise. (The waiting game will also make him less likely to get pushy about the carrots. He'll quickly learn that **you** control when he gets a treat, not him.)

**Wabash Valley  
Horseman's Association**

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**We're on the web!  
www.wvha.info**

**UPCOMING Shows:**

- May 15 (speed)
- June 19 (speed)
- July 4 (fun, pleasure & speed)
- Aug 14 (speed)
- Sept 6 (speed)
- Sept 18 (speed)
- Oct 10 (pleasure & speed)
- Fall Show & Bean dinner

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• **NOTE:** To help the environment, newsletters will be

• sent by email to everyone who provides me with your email.

• Please help us reduce paper usage by providing me with

• your email. Call me at 812-230-0697 or email

• deb@firstlovefarms.com

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**Do you have a skill/talent  
you would be willing to  
share with the club?  
Contact us.**

**We NEED Volunteers: ring  
s t e w a r d s , j u d g e s ,  
concession stand, office help,  
Frontier Parade, and  
anything else horse and/or  
show related.**

**Now accepting NEW  
members! Do you know of  
someone who would like to get  
involved with our club? Bring  
them to the next meeting!**



**FREE For Trail Riders**

The Equine Network now offers a free online newsletter for trail-riding enthusiasts. Called *On The Trail*, it features tips, advice, and ideas to help you enjoy the great outdoors with your horse.

To sign up to receive it, go to HorseandRider.com, and type On The Trail Newsletter Sign Up into the search box.

**Would you like the club to have a Spring and/or Fall trail ride? Contact us with feedback!**