



IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

1. WEGHIT LOSS DURING TRANSPORTATION
2. CONGRATULATIONS

WEIGHT LOSS DURING TRANSPORTATION

Feeding the competition horse is often quite a daunting task

However the essential point is to ensure the horse is fit enough to cope with the required level of work and that the rider has the necessary control and obedience, power and stamina needed for the discipline at the appropriate time, whilst maintaining an appropriate body condition.

This can easily be obtained through matching the energy level of a specific feed to the level of work the horse is doing, while supplying the correct type of energy sources. For example providing cereal grains can be ideal when fast release energy is needed (ideal for horses working for short bursts such as show jumping or racing, or for those that have a laid back temperament) while fats and high fibre can be ideal when slow release energy is needed (for example for Dressage or Showing or if the horse becomes very hot and/or needs extra body condition).

However have you ever thought of unexpected extras during competition that may impact on your horses energy level as well as his body condition? Although there are several, including stress and environmental temperature, One important factor to consider is transportation.



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Horses are often transported far and wide around the country, some manage this with no issues at all while others struggle with stress, weight loss and even fatigue.

Weight loss during transport is a common issue for horses and some horses can lose 2-3kg of body weight per hour (Marlin, 2007). Most of this is due to loss of water and thus for transportation of over an hour adequate water must always be provided, or water provided at an adequate number of stops.

Soaking hay can be a way of ensuring your horse receives more water while on the move, especially if he can be fussy about drinking away from home. It also has the advantage of cutting down on dust particles within the confined space.

Whilst most weight loss can be attributed to water loss have you ever thought of how much energy horses use whilst being transported.

There have been numerous studies on the subject with trailers and bigger horse boxes/floats being considered. But its thought that the amount of energy a horse uses during transport is in the region of the equivalent amount of walking (Marlin, 2007). So 1 hours' worth of travelling could equal approximately 1 hours of extra walking. The implication of this is that transport is tiring for horses and thus expecting your horse to travel long distances and then compete is not ideal for performance and the same would apply to going home. Human athletes do not travel long distances and immediately compete as the effect of travel on performance is well known and the same would apply for the horse.

So how does that effect the diet?

Well its very simple, if the horse uses more energy than he is eating then weight loss is likely to be seen, as well as having reduced energy levels leading to poor performance.

So when looking at your horses diet prior to competition its worth factoring in how much extra energy he is going to need to cover his transport time and making necessary changes ahead of time to ensure the horse is adequately prepared.

Whilst every horse is different and fitter horses may use less energy, it's thought that roughly one hours worth of walking would use in the region of 4-6MJ of energy for an average 500kg horse. So if travelling is the equivalent of walking then every hour of travel would use approximately 4-6MJ energy.

This could be further increased if there is any thermal stress (extreme heat for example) involved during transport. Some studies have shown that travelling in a trailer uses more energy than travelling in a larger float/horsebox, however assuming the above no matter the mode of transport will ensure your horse is well covered.

So therefore if you travel for 4 hours prior to a show that's around 16-24 MJ of extra energy your horse may need to be provided with. If we work on the lowest of 16MJ that is the equivalent of around:

- 3.2kg of extra good Teff
- 2.2kg kg of extra good Lucerne
- 1.3kg extra of a light-medium energy level feed
(at an energy of 12MJ per kg)
- 1.45kg extra of a Sugarbeet product (before soaking)
- 1.2kg extra Oats (on average)

Although timing of transportation may affect when a horse is fed (ie leaving early before breakfast can be given) the horse can always be provided with extra hay prior or during travel with his normal amount of concentrate feed per day being split into several meals on arrival. Always avoid cutting feeds out prior to competition as this can affect your horses performance. No horse should go longer than 4 hours, during transport or competition, without something to eat, as this can increase the risk of colic or gastric ulcers. Simply providing hay, will allow your horse to keep his digestive system healthy.

Generally speaking you always want to make changes to your horses diet slowly, however if the horse is simply getting more of a feed/hay he already receives than you don't have to make changes too far in advance and you can simply increase his feed. However if you are adding in an extra product that the horses doesn't normally receive do so ahead of time (at least 7-10days) to allow the horses digestive system to adapt to the new changes without putting his digestive system at risk of any upsets.

Keeping in mind that travel is costly to your horse's energy levels, adjusting for it can go a long way to ensure that your horse arrives still with plenty of fuel in his tank, as well as maintaining his condition.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Catherine Berning on her fantastic weekend at the South African Dressage Champs, at Stokkiesdraai. With a 1st, 2nd and 3rd under her belt on her horse Bravado, she went on to Win the Victor Ludorumn at Elementary level. She then achieved 2nd and 3rd Place with Quantico.

Congratulations Catherine we are proud to be able to support you in your incredible journey.

Horses all proudly fed Epol.



Congratulations to Sonica Engelbrecht who also competed at the National Dressage Champs. Sonica was the South African Advanced Dressage Champion on Peru's Scen Tao of Two Moons Appaloosa stud.

Congratulations Sonica are we proud to be able to assist you and your lovely horses.

Proudly fed Equus.



For an absolutely free consultation with no further obligation contact our professional consultants to schedule a visit to your yard.

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