

## Fact Sheet

### Show Off This Season!



With the long, dark and cold months nearly over (fingers crossed!), our thoughts turn to the forthcoming showing season. Early preparation for that dazzling coat shine or improved top line is far longer lasting and impressive, if you plan ahead than panic to rush everything three weeks before the planned event. This applies not just his grooming and exercise but to your horse's diet if you want him in tip top condition! Lizzie Drury MSc BSc (Hons), senior equine nutritionist at **Saracen Horse Feeds** gives her essential tips.

The first thing I always ask horse owners, before looking at their horses' diet is what their worming programme is. You need to make sure that your worming programmes are up to date and suitable, so that your horse gets the value of your feeding programme and not the worms! If you are unsure of suitable worming programmes discuss with your vet the possibilities and he may also suggest that you do a faecal egg count etc.

The second point to consider is that sharp or loose teeth can cause your horse severe discomfort and if chewing becomes difficult, then your horse will not be able to digest and utilize his feed properly, or at worst, he may even become a shy or fussy feeder. Obtaining show condition in this situation will never happen; so six monthly or annual teeth checks are essential.

Another important consideration is that over the winter period, with reduced turnout and exercise, many horses will have lost muscle tone and changed shape. This will change the way in which your saddle may fit so now is also the time to decide if your saddler needs to come and do some flocking before your fitness programme gets underway!

Your aim should be to have a horse that is fit and in the ideal body condition for the job that it is being asked to do. For example, a horse in peak eventing condition will carry less body condition than a horse that is able to win a ridden hunter class. However, it is important to realise that there should be no excuse for producing showing horses that carry excess body condition. This not only puts unnecessary strain on the heart, lungs, and joints etc but also predisposes the horse to laminitis. Body condition scoring is a practical way to monitor body fat content and learning how to condition score accurately should form the foundation of any equine management programme. The process of condition scoring involves taking the time to stand back and critically observe your horse. The second step involves feeling your horse with your hands, which does not mean simply running your hands over his ribs. Areas to feel, include, the neck and shoulder, withers, back and loins, hindquarters and ribs. On a condition score chart of 0-5, where a score of 0 indicates very poor condition and a score of 5 indicates a very fat horse, a horse in show condition should ideally have a condition score of 3.

Achieving optimum body condition and fitness means that your exercise and feeding programme must go hand in hand. One of these alone cannot possibly achieve a winning look. If your horse has done very little work, ideally you should try and start riding or lunging him regularly and wait at least 6-8 weeks before you start to do anything strenuous. Incorporating hill work will help to develop hindquarter muscles and working the horse in the correct outline will help to develop the muscles that make up the top line. Incidentally, feed alone will NOT give your horse top line.



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Here are my feeding suggestions for the different personality and physical types – recognise your horse?!

### Supermodel Skinny:

If your horse needs more weight, the aim should be to achieve this gradually to avoid the possible risks of laminitis or colic caused by sudden changes in diet or feeding large quantities per meal. Good quality forage should form the basis of your horse's diet and ideally constitute at least 60-70% or more of dry matter intake. Good quality forage such as early cut grass hay or a well made haylage will provide a large proportion of the horse's energy intake for work and condition, as well as providing the 'bulk' that is important to keep the digestive system healthy. Access to plenty of forage also stimulates saliva production through the process of chewing, which helps to buffer stomach acid and prevent gastric ulcers etc. Concentrate feeding will be similar to horses that have an excitable temperament, discussed below.

### Wild Thing:

Horses that have excitable temperaments usually benefit from a concentrate feed that is based on digestible fibres such as soya hulls, alfalfa and sugar beet (**Saracen Show Ring Mix or Show Improver Pencils**). The way in which these are digested in the horse's gut means that the energy is provided slowly, which helps to manage some of the more fizzy horses. To ensure that your horse is receiving all of the vitamins and minerals that he requires for optimum health make sure that you are feeding the manufacturer's recommended amounts.

### Larger Than Life:

If you have a horse that gets fat just looking at a bag of feed or is prone to laminitis, then the recommended feeding amounts for the above types of feeds may provide too many calories, which in turn will lead to excess weight. In these situations opt for low calorie feed balancers, such as Bio-Life 2000, which provide all the essential trace elements and quality protein but without the calories!

### Chilled Out:

For horses that are more laid back and straightforward, traditional conditioning feeds such as **Saracen Show Improver Mix** will encourage show condition. Feeds such as this use a variety of cereals e.g. barley and maize, which are micronized to increase digestibility and utilization and will provide the energy for work and weight gain. Providing that cereal based feeds are fed in sensible quantities, and not in one or two large meals, horses are can digest them efficiently with no ill effects on digestive health or temperament. As a general rule of thumb, concentrate meal size should not exceed 2.0 Kg for a horse and 1.0 Kg for a pony.



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Oil and fat supplements are frequently added to horse's diets to give that extra bit of gleam, to also increase the calorie density of a diet without the need to feed larger amounts of concentrate feed, to provide essential fatty acids such as linoleic acid and to help increase stamina. Soya oil and vegetable oil are popular supplements and can be added to a diet at levels of up to 450ml. It is not recommended to over feed liquid oil as undigested oil may reach the hindgut and interfere with fibre digestion, not to mention the possible palatability problems of an 'oily' meal! It is also important to remember that adding extra oil to the diet increases the need for extra antioxidant protection in the form of Vitamin E and it would be wise to check with a nutritionist that you have this covered.

Alternatives to liquid fat supplements are now available in the form of pelleted rice bran, e.g. **Equi-Jewel**. Rice bran has four to six times more fat than maize or oats. Fat supplements such as these are cleaner and easier to use than oils and are usually fed at between 1-2 pounds per day. In its natural state rice bran is abundant in phosphorous, so it is essential to use rice bran products that have a balanced calcium to phosphorous ratio.

When adding any liquid or fat supplement to a horse's diet, gradual introduction into the diet is important to prevent digestive upsets and ensure that metabolic systems are switched to make full use of the supplement.

Remember if you are intending to do a lot of travelling and staying away overnight, start thinking about suitable electrolyte supplements etc. Showing can be an exhausting time for both horse and handler and it's important to make sure that you both keep well hydrated. If your horse does not drink well when he is away start experimenting now with different water flavourings (apple juice etc) so that, this season, drinking need not be a headache! Make sure that you also have enough feed with you when you leave. It never fails to amaze me how frequently we can be asked to provide buckets of feed because someone has run out.

With all this in mind, one last thing to remember is....have a great time and good luck!

- **FOR FURTHER TECHNICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRODUCTS MENTIONED PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE [www.saracenhorsefeeds.co.uk](http://www.saracenhorsefeeds.co.uk) OR FOR A PERSONAL FEEDING PLAN PLEASE CALL OUR FEED HELPLINE 01622 718487.**



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