

## WHAT IS YOUR HORSES BODY MASS INDEX?

Some people may think they are being nice to their horse by feeding them the best feeds available, they are fat and their hair is slick. People are doing the best they know how, but we have taken an animal that has been bred for centuries to work and be fit, and in only a few decades, fed and confined them like an animal for slaughter. In Europe, there are breeds raised for slaughter that are not any heavier than some of our Quarter Horses. If we could just step back and make an observation, the cure to a lot of our horses' problems may be obvious.

We are feeding them like Sumo wrestlers and then wanting them to work like soccer players, or not work enough. In either case, they are not mentally or structurally designed for this life of luxury. Coming from a background of raising horses in harsh conditions, then seeing horses that are over cared for, and comparing the problems, there is no question—over feeding is a problem.

The ranch horses in the Great Basin may look like the High School Cross Country team, but they were healthy, fit and without the psychological problems found in stables and backyards. What most people identify as discipline problems with their horse is more likely too much stored energy. When they consume high-energy feeds and are not allowed the opportunity to exercise this energy off they can be hyperactive.

Horses that are confined and overfed will have problems with hypertension, digestion, hormones,

leg soundness, and if they are in training, the handlers will be challenged with directing the excess energy. Not to mention cribbing, weaving, ulcers, colic, founder, parasites and viruses not as prevalent in horses with lesser feeds in open spaces.

I see more problems mentally and physically with horses being over fed and under worked than with horses that are burning as much energy as they consume and maybe show a trace of their skeletal structure. When analysing problems with horses I often ask myself, “would this be a problem if the horse did not have excess energy?”

On the other hand, if you have a performance horse that is working hard and needs a consistent energy supply, grains like corn, oats, barely, and molasses, do not supply this. They contain excessive carbohydrates that lead to hypersensitivity because of the horse's inability to utilize too many carbohydrates at a given time. The nutrient levels of high protein hay many times are not consistent, which translates to the hay your horse gets today may be richer or poorer than what they will get tomorrow, even though it came from the same field and looks the same.

Although hay is not a reliable nutrient source for performance horses, it is necessary in every horses diet. Good grass hay will provide plenty of roughage and a great source of fibre. Other key ingredients to look for in a bagged feed are vitamin levels, organic minerals rather than inorganic

which the horse is unable to utilize, and Omega 3 essential fatty acids, which provide a more consistent energy than excessive carbohydrates.

I am not a nutritionist, but I deal with many problems and have witnessed much success in health and training programs due to the right balance between nutrition and the horse's workload.

Some situations don't allow the horse to have the space they need, but recognizing the effects for what they are and allowing more unrestricted exercise, more work, or consuming less energy can bring things back into balance.

Without the excess energy, more training could be done without extreme training methods which would result in happier, more willing horses. There is no doubt in my mind, if we could ask the horses who is the happiest and feels the best, it would be the ones without the crease down their back.