

**For successful Arabian reining trainer
Joint health management
pays off in show pen**

Preventing lameness is the best policy when training performance horses that compete at a high level. Although that may not always be possible, Arabian horse reining trainer John O'Hara understands the impact of lameness. He manages his horses to maintain joint health throughout their performance careers.

O'Hara and his veterinarian, Dr. Alan Donnell, of Equine Sports Medicine, Pilot Point, Texas, focus on several management practices to maintain healthy joints and sound horses.

"First of all, I rely on a very good farrier," says O'Hara, of John O'Hara Performance Horses, Valley View, Texas. "Those horses' hooves need to be balanced. If not, you can run into issues with the coffin joint, but I'm also watching the angle of the pasterns and making sure shoes fit correctly."

O'Hara knows from experience the importance of good farrier work, regardless of the riding discipline or breed of horse.

"We've had issues with shoeing," he says. "Years ago we had one 3-year-old we couldn't keep sound. We took him to Dr. Donnell and found that the angles of the front feet were not exactly the way they needed to be and the lateral balance wasn't right either. The problem started with the coffin joint and was expressed up through his fetlocks and tendons, all the way to his knees."

Now O'Hara personally oversees his farrier work and is attentive to detail. "Although horses are all a little different, as a general rule, I like to see a 55-degree angle on front hooves and 53 degrees on the rear," he says.

The second management practice is the use of Adequan® i.m. (polysulfated glycosaminoglycan) to keep the joints' wear-and-repair cycle in healthy balance.

"We recommend the use of Adequan® i.m. whenever the slightest symptoms of joint soreness are observed," says Dr. Donnell. "To obtain sound, healthy joints, Adequan® i.m. is an integral part of our treatment regimen with the use of an FDA-approved hyaluronic acid product."

"We do not recommend feed-through supplements," he continues. "Adequan® i.m. is the only FDA-approved intramuscular therapy. It's the best there is."

O'Hara agrees, "We have our horses looked at by Dr. Donnell and, basically, use the seven-shot series whenever it's warranted," he says. "Hocks and stifles can be major

issues due to the wear and tear of what we put these horses through, but the Adequan® i.m. helps us manage the hocks – particularly arthritic hocks.”

For horses being shown regularly, Dr. Donnell prescribes treatment with Adequan® i.m. when joint symptoms indicate the need. “During show season, I recommend the loading dose, which is a treatment every four days for a total of seven shots, then retreating as needed,” he says. “The use of Adequan® i.m. early, when soreness or joint dysfunction is first observed, is much cheaper than treating a lame horse; and, you don’t lose any training time or your economic position in showing. The economic impact of lameness is much greater than the cost of maintaining joint health.”

These equine professionals offer that their third joint health practice is a common sense approach to exercise and training. As with many practitioners, Dr. Donnell prescribes regular exercise, although he prefers horses are not overworked. He also recommends wrapping legs and checking them after riding.

“Wrapping those legs up for protection is important, especially if you happen to ride horses too hard,” he says. “And if you have ridden a horse too hard, give him an anti-inflammatory to keep the inflammation down.”

O’Hara also emphasizes wrapping legs and notes that every horse is wrapped prior to lunging or working. “If we see any swelling, we will hydro with cold water and might go to the ice boot,” says O’Hara. “We just use regular rubbing alcohol before wrapping the legs and wrap them all the way around.”

The fourth management practice is to adopt a nutrition package that’s well-balanced with trace minerals to support the physiology of the animal and to help maintain joint health, according to Dr. Donnell.

Extra focus on these four management practices will keep horses’ joints in healthy balance and improve success rates in the show pen.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

“A good horse is a good horse,” says NRHA trainer John O’Hara. “They must have the temperament to let them focus and do that event.” His young mare RF Scarlet O’Hara, was the highest placing 4-year-old in the 2010 Scottsdale Half Arab Reining Futurity – in just her second show.

Photo Credit: Osteen/Schatzberg Photography



With NRHA trainer John O’Hara aboard, Tucks For Bucks won about \$36,000 at 2009 February’s Scottsdale Half Arab Futurity. The horse belonged to Rob and Katie Walters, of Sherwood, Oregon. Scottsdale was the 5-year-old gelding’s first show with O’Hara.

Photo Credit: Osteen/Schatzberg Photography

