

ASK THE EXPERTS

HORSE&RIDER EXPERTS SOLVE READERS' PROBLEMS

Minette Rice Edwards trains horses and riders up to Grand Prix level dressage, and she also teaches jumping.



Fliss Gillott BSc, BHSII, BHS SM, riding instructor, answers your questions on riding and schooling.



The horse should be happy to accept a light contact from a sympathetic rider

and the sub-lingual (located under the tongue). If the glands are to release saliva easily for the horse to mouth and be comfortable with the bit, he must be happy and working in a soft outline, with a relaxed jaw and the correct head, neck, back relationship.

The mechanics

For this to be achieved, it is important to remember that the equine 'engine' is in the rear. He should be working with engaged hind legs and hindquarters, and a free back and neck, lifting up through the withers so that the poll is the highest point. His head can then hang freely from the poll, so that his face is on or slightly in front of the vertical. And, of course, the horse's outline will vary

according to his age, confirmation, strength and type of work he is doing.

All of us can appreciate that anything which creates anxiety, excessive tension or pain in the horse (poor riding or injury, for instance) will produce adrenalin. This inhibits the production of saliva, and causes the horse to have a dry and probably uncomfortable mouth.

Happy horse

As far as I know, there is no veterinary evidence that tight over-bending of the neck or jaw prevents the flow of saliva, but it does cause stress, which in turn produces adrenalin. A soft, foamy mouth (around the lips) is desirable, but the other signs that a horse is happy and comfortable in his work must accompany it. If there is copious foam or a

continuous drooling, accompanied by a tight, possibly sweating neck and rigid jaw – which could be due to continuous compression, poor biting, or a sore tooth or mouth – it must be realised that the horse is in pain, and the tension in the jaw and tongue is preventing normal swallowing, hence the drooling.

Working correctly

On the other hand, not all horses foam. In my experience, those with fleshy mouths and lips are more likely to foam than those with a small mouth. If the horse is working happily and correctly, but with little or no foam, don't worry – they are all different!

So to sum up... A 'wet' mouth is usually preferable to a 'dry' one, but the most important factor is for the horse to be working correctly from behind, accepting a light and comfortable contact from a sympathetic rider.

Did you know...

That horses produce about 12 gallons (55 litres) of saliva in one day?

Why the foam?

Q What does it mean when a horse foams at the mouth? A friend of mine says it's because the horse is relaxed in its jaw – is this true?

Minette Rice Edwards answers:

The answer to your question is, 'Yes, it can be', but there's more to it than that! The foam is, in fact, saliva that's aerated by the subtle movements of the horse's mouth and tongue,

which produces a 'whipped egg white-looking' substance.

Horses have three pairs of salivary glands. These are the parotid glands (the largest situated in the throat latch area near the poll), the sub-maxillary (situated in the jaw)

If the glands are to release saliva for the horse to mouth, he must be happy and working in a soft outline



Schooling rules OK!

Q I recently bought a six-year-old gelding who has been schooled to a degree, but he has started to throw his toys out the pram! My trainer says I need to go back to basics, but what are the basics?

Fliss Gillott answers:

Although many schooling problems can be directly attributable to the skill of the rider, or to the horse's receptiveness and ability to oblige, there are some routine checks you can go through when difficulties arise.

First and foremost, is the horse sound? Lameness in one limb will be evident from an uneven gait and nodding of the head. However, when both forelimbs or both hind limbs are affected, nodding will not be apparent, but a reluctance to go forward, jump or perform as well as would normally be expected may initially be the only indication that a problem is developing. If in doubt, ask your vet.

Management

Take a critical look at the daily routine for your horse. Of particular interest is time spent at grass and socialising with others, as well as the amount of food the horse consumes. The more natural a horse's lifestyle, the more likely it is that he will be content and willing to perform well. For example, cereal and molasses-free diets, which are closer to the diet nature designed the horse's system to deal with, are increasingly found to be successful in restoring mental wellbeing to the anxious or over-exuberant.

Always ask yourself if your horse is mature and fit enough – and sufficiently prepared through his earlier training and from how you set him up for each movement – to do your bidding. Lastly, take responsibility for your horse's performance with an assessment of your own riding. Although good, regular instruction is the ideal, anyone will be able to tell you if you sit straight when



Top tip

● Further basic schooling checks include examining the horse's teeth and back, and making sure your tack is fitting correctly, especially the saddle. For any of these potential problems areas, call in a specialist. This is not expensive if you keep your horse on a yard or can organise visits to tie in with others in your area. The benefits of routine check-ups may be immeasurable.

viewed from behind or in front.

With all these checks in place, and the confidence that your horse is physically

and mentally capable of going well, you'll be able to get down to the serious business of working on the present areas of difficulty.

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