

HERO

HANDBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on finding your new horse through the HERO programme.

Over the past few weeks your standardbred has completed an intensive education period with his/her HERO Educator to ensure your horse is safe, sound, and suitable for life as a hack. Your horse has experienced some substantial changes from life as a racehorse including a change of diet, routine, workload, environment, and the people caring

for them. Additionally, your horse is still in the educational stages of becoming a full-time hack and will require your patience and support along the way.

This handbook has been created to help smooth your horse's transition into life as your hack with information and advice from equestrian industry professionals.

SETTLING INTO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

There are a few measures you can take to help your horse settle into their new home with as little stress as possible.

In the paddock:

- Provide your horse with a sensible mate – either in the paddock with them or a paddock alongside them. Horses are herd animals and prefer company and you will find your horse relaxes in their new home faster if they have company.
- If your horse will be living in a herd situation, expect that your new horse will need to establish its place in the herd. Your horse may be overly submissive or dominant as the group adjusts to its new herd member. It may be wise to pair your new horse with one other horse from the group in a separate paddock for a few days prior to turning out with the group. This allows the new horse the security of having bonded with one of the horses from the herd.
- Establish a routine – horses love routine and visiting and feeding your horse at roughly the same time each day is a good way to provide routine that your horse will find reassuring.

In new facilities such as stables and yards, or areas used for gearing up:

- In the first few days of working with your new horse it can be useful to have another horse in the tie up area for company.

- Establish a routine when bringing your horse in to prepare for riding and stick to the routine for a few weeks until your horse is well settled in your facilities. This could include picking out feet followed by a good brush before saddling, while a post exercise routine might include a brush or wash down followed by a treat or feed when they return to the paddock.
- Don't worry if your HERO horse is a little impatient to begin with when tied up in the yard – they will soon learn to relax and develop patience. Having spent several years in busy racing stables with staff waiting on them hand and foot, your horse won't have spent a lot of time waiting around! Routine, as described above, will go a long way in helping your horse learn to relax. It can take a horse a few weeks to adjust to their new environment – they not only have to adjust to a new paddock and new friends, but also new humans, feed, and facilities where they are handled and ridden.

FEEDING

Your new horse will have experienced significant changes to its feeding regime since retiring from racing. Racehorses typically have a diet including a high concentration of grains to provide them plenty of energy. As your horse transitions to life as a hack a high fibre diet is essential to promote good gut health, nutrition, and cool energy.

While in the HERO programme your horse is fed McMillan Grain free alongside plenty of roughage. We also supplement with Seahorse

Supplements – either Maxia Digest or Maxia Complete, both of which provide excellent gastrointestinal support. You may like to consider keeping your horse on this diet as they adjust to their new home.

Check out our feeding **Do's** and **Don'ts** below:

DO:

Feed plenty of fibre! Horses need a minimum of 1% of their bodyweight in fibre per day, generally around 5 – 7kg, to provide them with a constant slow-release source of energy and maintain good gut health. Good fibre sources include pasture, hay, Chaff either Lucerne or meadow, as well as soakable fibre products such as Grain Free or Speedibeet.

Feed little and often and stick to a routine– two small feeds per day will benefit your horse more than one large feed. Remember your horses stomach is only the size of a rugby ball!!

Consider your horses body condition score – ideally your horse should have a score of 3. If your horse has a lower score additional feeding is required, and your horse's condition should be closely monitored. If body condition worsens the vet should be contacted to check for underlying issues.

If your horse has a body condition score of 4 or 5 your horse may require a gradual reduction in feed intake and some additional exercise.

Steer clear of high energy feeds such as oats, barley, and pre-mixed racehorse feeds – unless your horse is undergoing intense exercise it will not require these, feeds such as NRM low GI sport and McMillan Grain Free provide slow-release energy and would be more suitable for your horse.

Consider using a supplement for gut support, such as Maxia Digest, as your horse settles into their new home. Vitamin E and Magnesium supplements are also useful to support your horse in times of stress or to help with the effects of high energy spring grass.

0 Very poor		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very sunken rump • Deep cavity under tail • Skin tight over bones • Very prominent backbone and pelvis • Marked ewe neck
1 Poor		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunken rump • Cavity under tail • Ribs easily visible • Prominent backbone and croup • Ewe neck - narrow and slack
2 Moderate		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat rump either side of backbone • Ribs just visible • Narrow but firm neck • Backbone well covered
3 Good		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rounded rump • Ribs just covered but easily felt • No crest, firm neck
4 Fat		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rump well rounded • Gutter along back • Ribs and pelvis hard to feel • Slight crest
5 Very fat		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very bulging rump • Deep gutter along back • Ribs buried • Marked crest • Fold and lumps of fat

DON'T:

Make any abrupt feed changes - any feed changes should be made gradually over 2 – 3 weeks to allow your horse to adjust.

Turn your new horse straight out into a paddock full of lush, fresh grass (if you live on a dairy farm this one's for you!). The high levels of sugars in lush grass like that seen on dairy farms can wreak havoc on a horse's gut microbes and potentially cause colic or laminitis.

For help with any of the above issues or just to check you are on the right track please contact nutrition specialist Fiona Gillies 021 825 872 or Fiona.gillies@nrm.co.nz



STOMACH ULCERS IN HORSES

Good nutrition and feeding regimes play a large role in the prevention and treatment of equine gastric disease, or stomach ulcers, which is believed to affect between 40 – 70% of sport horses and hacks. Not all horses suffer from the negative effects of ulcers, but symptoms can include:

- Reduced appetite – a preference for hay or grass over hard feed
- Weight loss despite still eating normally
- Coat becomes dull or coarse
- Developing a sour or grumpy disposition
- Reluctance to exercise or uncharacteristic stress when exercising
- Frequent stretching out as though going to urinate
- Increased sensitivity around the stomach area
- Excessive teeth grinding
- Recurrent bouts of colic

The only conclusive way to diagnose stomach ulcers in horses is by gastric endoscopy performed by a vet. There are several effective veterinary treatments available but there are some simple things you can do to prevent or reduce the effects of stomach ulcers.

- Feed plenty of fibre – having fibrous matter in the stomach promotes healthy gut microbes, as horses are hind gut fermenters fibre is essential to gut health and wellbeing.
- Don't exercise your horse on an empty stomach – feeding your horse at least 1kg of coarse fibre such as lucerne chaff prior to exercise will provide a matt on the top of the stomach acid and prevent stomach acid splashing and aggravating the sensitive upper mucosa of the stomach.
- Feed your horse at least 1kg of coarse fibre such as lucerne chaff or hay prior to travelling – as above, this will provide a matt on the top of the stomach acid and prevent stomach acid splashing and aggravating the sensitive upper mucosa of the stomach.
- Feed gastrointestinal supplements such as Maxia Digest, Maxia complete, Equishure.

If you suspect your horse has ulcers and the above management tips have not helped contact Tracey at Seahorse supplements 027 226 8603 or email tracey@seahorsesupplements.co.nz or your vet for advice and treatment.



ROUTINE CARE

Your new horse will require regular, ongoing care to keep them happy and in tip top shape. This includes:

Shoeing or hoof trimming

Some horses will require shoes if they are doing a lot of exercise or have sensitive hooves, whereas some horses have strong hooves and are quite comfortable without shoes. Your farrier will be able to advise you on what is best for your horse in its current situation.

Regardless of if your horse is shod or not, your horses will require shoeing or trimming every 5 – 8 weeks depending how fast their hoof grows. Once again, your farrier will be able to advise you how often works best for your horse.

Worming

At a minimum your horse should be wormed twice a year in late summer/autumn and early spring. If your horse is kept in a heavily grazed paddock, they may require additional worming. To ensure you are on the right worming program it is recommended that you do a FEC (fecal egg count) at least once a year, this can be done easily by taking a fresh poo sample to your local vet practice where they will assess the number of eggs present in your horses poop and whether he requires deworming, this is a minimal cost (about the same as a wormer) and will ensure that you don't build drench resistance in your horses.

Dental treatment

Up until 5 years of age horses should have their teeth checked and treated by a qualified equine dentist or vet every 6 – 8 months. After 5 years of age teeth should be checked and treated once per year.

If you notice your horse becoming unusually sensitive in the mouth, uncharacteristic head flicking, resisting the bit, excessive drooling, or dropping a lot of feed, you may need to have their teeth checked.

Bodywork/massage

Your horse may benefit from bodywork or massage as it adjusts to life as a riding horse. Just like us horses can get stiff and sore when they exercise – especially when they are developing fitness to carry a rider and learning new skills! Find someone in your area who comes with good recommendations to give your horse a physio session so you can stay on top of any aches and pains your horse may have.

Saddle fitting

It is a good idea to have a saddle fitter check your saddle is a good fit for your horse. Riding will be a more pleasant experience for you and your horse with a correctly fitted saddle. A saddle fitter will often be able to make some simple changes to your saddle on the spot to ensure your horse will be comfortable.

Rugging

While rugging isn't essential, we do recommend a warm, waterproof rug for your horse in winter. Horses begin to use extra energy to keep themselves warm when the temperature drops below 5 degrees. Keeping your horse warm will help them maintain their condition over winter and keep them a little cleaner in the winter mud!

ONGOING EDUCATION

Your horse will have learnt many new skills and has been exposed to a raft of new experiences with their HERO Educator. However, it's important to remember that your horse is still green and will still need some guidance and education. A good place to start is by developing good routines with your horse and getting to know their personality by spending time handling and working with them.

It is important to remember to be forgiving in the early stages of your horse's transition into hack life. Always start your workout with a simple warm up doing exercises your horse is familiar with before asking for more challenging exercises. Be patient, clear and consistent with your directions to the horse and always reward the horse when they do what you have asked.

Often when horses are learning new skills or doing new types of exercise they will get physically and mentally tired quite quickly. Your horse will benefit more from a short, quality workout rather than a long, intense workout when they are being educated. Always finish the workout with a skill the horse is familiar with to allow them to relax and reinforce a good experience of exercise. A simple trot around the arena or walking on a free rein is a good option.

If you aren't experienced with green horses, we recommend finding a coach or instructor to help you with your horse. A fortnightly lesson will be highly beneficial to both you and your horse and ensure you are both progressing toward suitable goals.

A NOTE ON CANTERING

Many standardbreds are bred to pace and as a result have 5 gaits – walk, trot, canter, gallop, and pace. Horses don't need hobbles on to pace and it is a very smooth, ground covering gait. You may occasionally find your horse paces when you want to transition from trot to canter.

If your horse does this, bring them back to a balanced trot before trying for the canter again. Use very clear, strong aids, and always reward the horse when they canter and ensure you allow them to canter on for several strides.

A horse is very unlikely to break from the pace to a canter – in fact they are taught not to when they are racehorses! However, they do canter and gallop in the cart as part of their fitness training as racehorses so you can be assured, they most certainly do know how to use all 5 of their gaits!

STANDARD BRED EXPERTS

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience of standardbreds as sport horses and hacks amongst participants of the HERO programme. If you require help, advice, or recommendations we are more than willing to help!

Georgie Bolton - HERO Manager
027 309 1756 | georgie@hrnz.co.nz

Natalie Gameson - HERO Co-ordinator
021 936 155 | natalie@hrnz.co.nz

Fiona Gillies - Equine Nutrition Specialist
021 825 872 | Fiona.Gillies@nrm.co.nz

Please make sure you join all the other HERO horse owners on the Facebook HERO owners page, we have competitions from time to time and everyone loves to see what you get up to with your HERO horse so please feel free to post pictures etc.



