

HERO HORSE OWNER HANDBOOK 2026

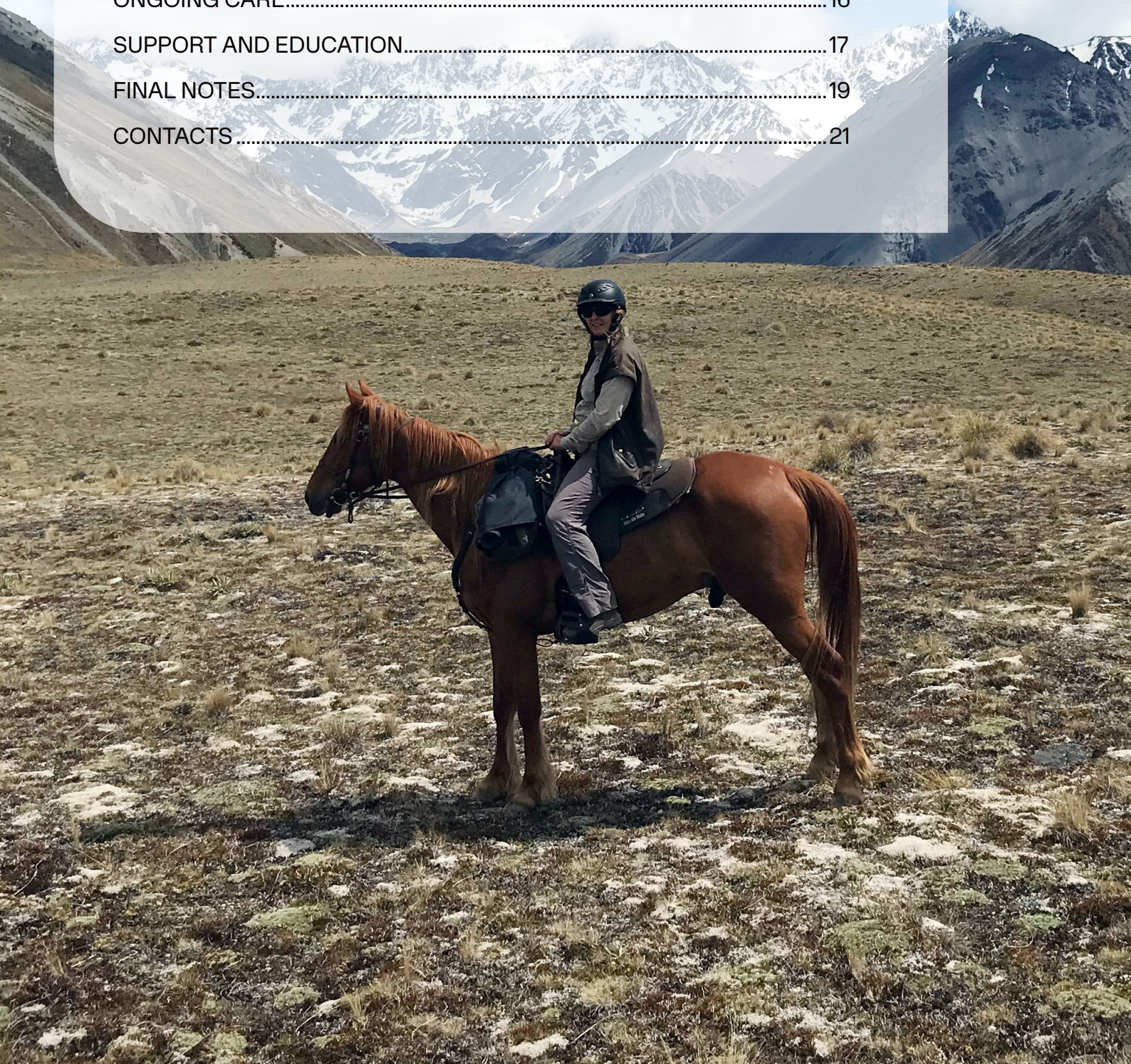


HERO

Harness Education & Re-homing Opportunities

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WELCOME

Congratulations on finding your new horse through the HERO programme.

Your Standardbred has recently completed an intensive education period to prepare them for life as a ridden horse. However, they are still learning.

They've experienced major changes – diet, routine, environment, workload, and people – and will need time, patience, and consistency to fully settle and thrive.

This handbook is designed to help you transition your HERO horse into their new life safely, confidently, and successfully.

YOUR FIRST FEW WEEKS AT A GLANCE

STAGE	FOCUS	KEEP IT SIMPLE
DAYS 1-3	Settling in	Routine, turnout, companionship, quiet handling
DAYS 4-7	Ground connection	Grooming, leading, gear checks, calm groundwork
WEEK 2 ONWARD	Short ridden sessions	Walk work, confidence, repetition, low pressure
ONGOING	Strength + education	Consistency, correct feeding, hoof care, lessons

🕒 Routine

Same times, same handling, same calm approach.

🌾 Fibre first

Keep feed simple and introduce changes slowly.

🐎 Confidence before performance

Don't rush canter, schooling, or independence.

👁️ Watch for subtle changes

Behaviour, appetite, manure, feet, and movement tell you a lot.

💡 Ask for help early

Vet, farrier, coach, nutritionist, or the HERO team.





SETTLING INTO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

First Week Priorities:

- Quiet paddock or turnout space
- Calm horse companion nearby
- Same feed and hay as before
- Fresh water and shelter
- Daily routine kept consistent
- Time to observe behaviour, appetite, and manure

Simple Transition Formula

Calm environment + consistent routine + gradual change = smoother settling

Give Them Time

- Allow a few days to decompress before riding
- Let them take in new surroundings, paddock mates, and routines

Keep Feeding Consistent

- Stick to their current feed and hay for at least 7–10 days
- Fibre (grass, hay, chaff) should make up the majority of your horse's diet – it's essential for proper gut function.
- Introduce any changes gradually over 2–3 weeks
- Be cautious with rich pasture (especially dairy pasture)

Watch for Ulcers

Common during transitions. Signs include: Girthiness, dull coat, reduced appetite, behaviour changes, teeth grinding, colic signs.

☞ If concerned, contact your vet early

Build Routine

- Feed, bring in, and handle at consistent times
- Predictability reduces stress

Avoid Overload

- Introduce new experiences gradually
- Don't try everything on day one

Social Contact Matters

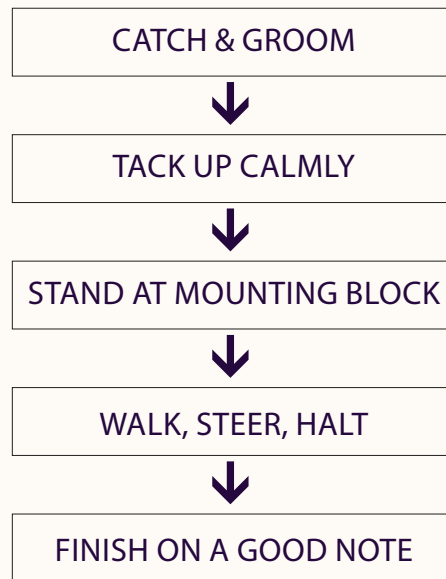
- Avoid isolation
- Provide a calm paddock companion or neighbour

Expect Behaviour Changes

- Quiet → cheeky, or anxious → settled
- This is normal – allow time

THE FIRST RIDE

Ground check → Gear check → Calm mounting → Walk only → Finish early



Ride Goal Reminder

The first ride is not a schooling session.

It is a confidence session for both horse and rider.

Don't Rush

- Wait a few days
- Build trust through groundwork first

Establish Ground Manners

Ensure your horse can: – Be caught, led, tied – Pick up feet, groom calmly

Check Your Gear

- Ensure saddle fits correctly (no pinching, even contact)
- Check bridle/bit comfort
- Confirm what gear they previously used

Choose the Right Environment

- Quiet, enclosed space
- Good footing, minimal distractions

Use a Companion Horse

- Helps reduce anxiety if they're used to company

Mounting Matters

- Use a mounting block
- Reward standing still
- Reset if they fidget

Keep It Simple

- 10–15 minutes
- Walk only: steering, stopping, relaxation
- Set Small Goals
- Pick 1–2 simple goals (e.g. halt, steering)
- Finish once achieved

End on a Good Note

- Stop before things go wrong

Use Your Voice

- Standardbreds often respond well to voice cues

Reflect, Don't React

- Note what worked
- Keep expectations realistic

Repeat the Familiar

- Consistency builds confidence

Manage Your Energy

- Stay calm, soft, and clear



CANTERING YOUR STANDBRED

Remember

Canter is developed, not forced.

Balance and strength come before duration.

Canter is a learned skill for most Standardbreds and takes time.

Introduce on the Lunge

- Use voice cues
- Allow them to find balance without a rider

Expect Pacing

- Normal in pacers — not disobedience
- Rebalance and try again

Choose the Right Place

- Balanced, calm trot first

Expect Imperfection

- Short, unbalanced, incorrect leads are normal

Useful Exercises

- Trot poles into canter
- Gentle hill work
- Riding with a buddy
- Frequent transitions

Manage the Mental Side

- Keep calm, avoid pressure
- Some horses associate speed with stress

Look for Progress

- Better balance, rhythm, relaxation
- Not just duration



COMMON ISSUES UNDER SADDLE

IF YOUR HORSE...	IT OFTEN MEANS...	START WITH...
WON'T GO FORWARD	Confusion, weakness, dull response	Clear aid, one backup aid, transitions
LEANS ON THE BIT	Using the contact for balance	Half-halts, soft hands, bending exercises
PACES	Habit, tension, lack of strength	Poles, transitions, rebalance
RUSHES	Anxiety or misunderstanding	Circles, breathing, rhythm work
FREEZES	Shutdown, overwhelm	Small lateral steps, reset calmly
WON'T STAND TO MOUNT	Inconsistency or tension	Repeat routine, reward stillness
TRIPS	Weakness, hoof imbalance, poor coordination	Pole work, varied terrain, hoof check

Important

Most issues are not disobedience.

They are usually communication, confidence, or strength issues.

These are normal during transition and usually easy to resolve with consistency.

Reluctance to Go Forward

- Use clear aids + reinforce once (don't nag)
- Build impulsion with poles, hills, transitions

Leaning on the Bit

- Avoid pulling
- Use soft contact, half-halts, direction changes

High Head / Hollowing

- Often due to weakness
- Encourage long and low work
- Check saddle fit

Pacing Under Saddle

- Use poles and transitions to retrain trot

Rushing

- Use circles, transitions, and rider relaxation

Freezing (Shutdown)

- Use small movements (lateral steps, flexion)
- Avoid escalation

Herd-Bound Behaviour

- Build independence gradually
- Use short loops and groundwork

Mounting Issues

- Be consistent
- Reward standing still

Steering Problems

- Use large shapes, leg + rein aids
- Groundwork helps understanding

Boredom

- Keep sessions varied and short

Tripping

- Improve strength and balance with poles
- Check hoof balance and shoeing



FEEDING AND NUTRITION

Easy Feeding Rules

Remember

- Plenty of fibre
- Little and often
- Slow-release energy
- Gut support when needed
- Sudden changes
- Lush pasture too quickly
- High-energy race feeds unless truly needed

Key Principles

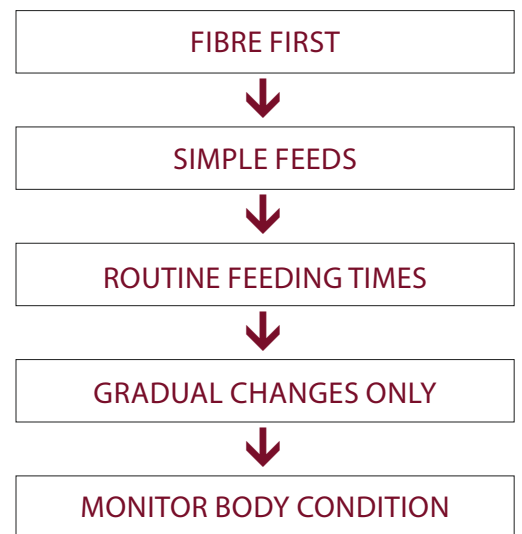
- High fibre diet = essential
- Low starch = better for temperament and gut

Do

- Feed 1–1.5% bodyweight in fibre (approx. 5–7kg)
- Feed little and often
- Maintain routine
- Monitor body condition (ideal score: 3)
- Use suitable feeds (e.g. low GI, grain-free)
- Consider gut support supplements

Don't

- Make sudden feed changes
- Turn out on lush pasture immediately
- Feed high-energy racehorse feeds unnecessarily



Recommended Support

- McMillan Grain Free
- Maxia Digest / Maxia Complete
- Vitamin E, Magnesium (as needed)

 **For advice: Fiona Gillies (NRM)**
Fiona Gillies – Equine Nutrition Specialist
021 825 872 | fiona.gillies@nrm.co.nz



Seahorse
SUPPLEMENTS

PREMIUM EQUINE DIGESTIVE SUPPLEMENTS



MAXIA DIGEST IS A COMBINATION OF SUPERIOR, RESEARCHED INGREDIENTS THAT HELP TO:

- ✓ Buffer the foregut and support the hindgut microbial population
- ✓ Boost the digestive and immune system
- ✓ Support a healthy coat and hooves
- ✓ Support feed conversion and nutrient absorption



Proudly NZ owned and operated
Supporting healthy New Zealand horses

www.seahorsesupplements.co.nz



GRAIN FREE

SUPERIOR FIBRE FEED

LOW STARCH AND SUGAR.

HIGH FIBRE MASH

CONTAINS MINS AND VITS WITH AN ADDED FAT SOURCE



The ideal feed for transition from the racetrack to a happy hack!

We are proud to be supporting the HERO program
McMillan Equine Feeds are available at rural retailers nationwide

SUPPORTING YOUR HERO HORSE BEYOND RACING

The transition from racehorse to riding horse is an important stage in your Standardbred's journey. Alongside good management, appropriate nutrition, regular veterinary care and a well-planned training programme, some owners choose to include supplements to support their horse's health and wellbeing.

BetaVet is a proud supporter of the HERO Programme and specialises in natural equine health products developed for performance, pleasure and retired horses.

The following page shares the BetaVet story and their commitment to producing high-quality, New Zealand-made supplements to support horses throughout every stage of their lives.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS FOR PERFORMANCE HORSES

OUR STORY

THE BETAVET STORY

At BetaVet, we are dedicated to delivering quality you can trust.

BetaVet was established in 2009 and strives to lead the way in natural equine health and support for both race, performance and young horses with a wide range of equine therapeutic natural supplements to provide competitive edge and giving peace of mind to owners. We know that effective herbal medicine starts with the finest raw materials, so we carefully source only the best ingredients for our formulations.

Our passion for horses is matched by our extensive knowledge of herbal medicine, allowing us to create a wide range of therapeutic products that support performance, racing and leisure horses – from yearlings to those on the racetrack in competition arenas or in the paddock.

Every product is crafted with precision in our high-end facility in Christchurch and is manufactured under FAMI-QS standards and certified CAFFEINE FREE.

This commitment to quality ensures that our formulations are consistent, effective, and ready to make a real difference in your horse's performance and well-being.

Our Sales Representatives **Kylie Unsworth 022 078 4958 – North Island** and **Nicky Kennedy 027 276 1705 – South Island** are both available for a personal consultation to discuss your EQUINE HERO'S supplement needs.

✓
FAMI-QS
CERTIFIED

✓
CAFFEINE
FREE

✓
CRAFTED IN
CHRISTCHURCH

✓
PREMIUM
INGREDIENTS

BetaVet
NATURAL SOLUTIONS
WWW.BETAVET.CO.NZ

BETAVET NATURAL SOLUTIONS

Ashwagandha + RMM

STRESS & ANXIETY

An ancient adaptogen reimagined for the modern performance horse.

BetaVet is proud to support HERO, helping Standardbreds settle into new environments, manage stress, and adapt to new training styles with natural support for calmness and long-term wellbeing.

ADAPTOGENIC HERBAL SUPPLEMENT

Supporting Your Horse's Stress Response – Naturally

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is a revered adaptogenic herb rooted in thousands of years of Ayurvedic tradition. Owners report that horses appear more settled, focused, and better able to cope with the daily demands of training, travel, and competition – helping them switch off the fight-or-flight response and find their equilibrium.

Paired with Red Marine Minerals (Lithothamnion), a species of calcified red algae harvested from pristine Atlantic waters, this blend delivers 74 naturally occurring trace minerals – including calcium, magnesium, zinc, iron, and selenium – in a highly bioavailable form.

"All the horses arrived at the show very relaxed and behaved extremely well. The young ones are more inclined to be less reactive – and learning is so much more enjoyable for them. It's a great product!"

– ZOE GRAY

"I have now been using the Ashwagandha RMM for over 3 weeks now – can't believe the improvement in Arundel. He has always been an internal worrier and suffered from separation anxiety and bit of fence walker. There has been a huge improvement...he is so much more chilled out in the paddock and in the box, this product has really helped him. Game changer product highly recommend."

– JO HARRISON

KEY BENEFITS

- Wellbeing, calming & conditioning blend
- Supports adrenal restoration in nervous & young horses
- Natural muscle mass conditioner for topline development
- 74 bioavailable trace minerals
- Natural calcium supplement
- Contains no banned substances

FEEDING RATE

Ponies **5 g / day**
Horses **10 g / day**
1 scoop = **10 g**

✓ TESTED FREE OF
CAFFEINE

BetaVet Natural Solutions
betavet.co.nz

SOUTH ISLAND
Nicky Kennedy
027 276 1705

NORTH ISLAND
Kylie Unsworth
022 078 4958

AVAILABLE IN
200g · 500g · 1.5kg · 3kg



STOMACH ULCERS IN HORSES

Visual Red Flags

- ⚠ Poor appetite
- ⚠ Weight loss
- ⚠ Dull coat
- ⚠ Girthiness
- ⚠ Teeth grinding
- ⚠ Colic signs
- ⚠ Behaviour changes under saddle

Simple Prevention Checklist

- Plenty of fibre daily
- Fibre before exercise
- Fibre before travel
- Consistent routine
- Early vet advice if signs appear

Common in transitioning horses (40–70%)

Signs

- Poor appetite, weight loss
- Behaviour changes
- Teeth grinding, colic signs

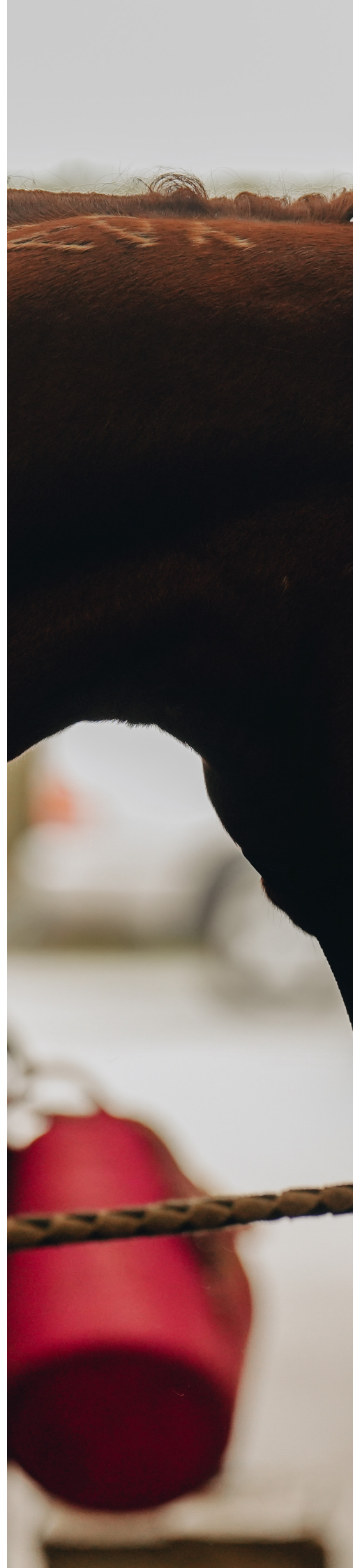
Prevention

- Feed fibre before exercise/travel
- Maintain consistent feeding
- Use gut supplements

📞 For advice: Lillian Bonner & Tracey Moir

Lillian Bonner – DVM: Integrated Veterinary
021 951 059 | lillianbonnerDVM@gmail.com

Tracey Moir – Seahorse Supplements
027 226 8603 | tracey@seahorsesupplements.co.nz





ONGOING CARE

CARE AREA	GENERAL GUIDE
HOOVES	Every 4–6 weeks
TEETH	Check within first 6–12 weeks, then routinely
BODYWORK	Early in retraining and as needed
WORMING/FEC	Based on results and vet advice
SADDLE FIT	Early, then re-check as shape changes
VACCINATIONS	Discuss with your vet

The Big Picture

Comfort → Confidence → Rideability → Longevity

Hoof Care

- Trim every 4–6 weeks
- Transition from racehorse hoof shape

Dental Care

- Check within 6–12 weeks
- Address sharp points or imbalances

Bodywork

- Helps with muscle imbalance from harness work
- Recommended within first few months

Worming

- Use faecal egg counts (FEC)
- Targeted worming reduces resistance

Pasture Management

- NZ grass can be very rich
- Watch for laminitis, gut issues, behaviour changes

Joint Support

- Monitor for stiffness or past injuries
- Consider supplements and vet input

Saddle Fit

- Essential for comfort and progress
- Reassess as horse develops

Vaccinations

- Tetanus (essential)
- Strangles (recommended – discuss with vet)

Seasonal Care (NZ)

- Adjust rugging, feed, and turnout
- Provide shade in summer, forage in winter





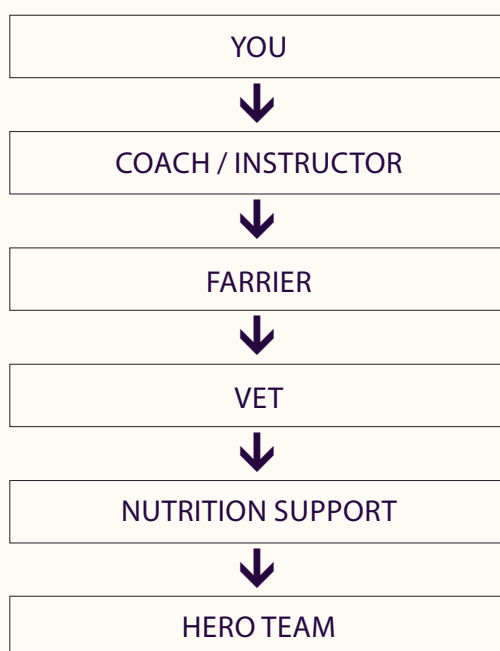
SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

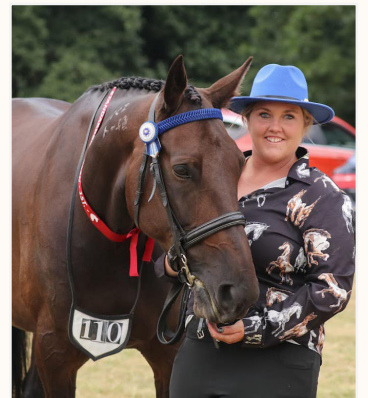
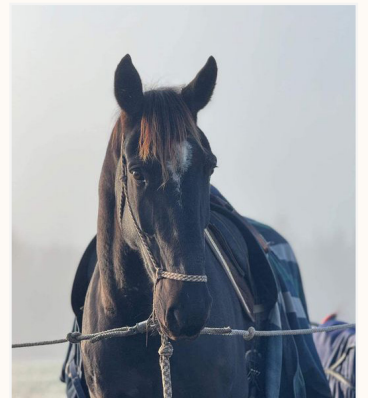
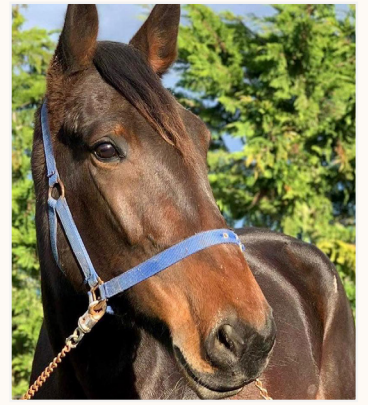
Build Your Support Team

A good support team makes problem-solving faster, simpler, and far less stressful.

If you are inexperienced with green horses: - Work with a coach or instructor - Fortnightly lessons recommended

Consistency and good guidance will fast-track your progress.





FINAL NOTES

What Your HERO Horse Needs Most

- ♥ Patience
- 🗨️ Clear communication
- 🔄 Consistency
- 👊 Time to build strength
- 🌿 Good management
- 🏆 Small wins celebrated

Rehomed does not mean finished — it means ready for the next chapter.

Your horse is:- Learning a new job - Adjusting to a new life - Relying on you for clarity and consistency
Take your time, celebrate small wins, and enjoy the process.

Standardbreds are intelligent, willing horses that thrive with good horsemanship.





CONTACTS

Georgie Bolton – HERO Manager

027 309 1756 | hero@hrnz.co.nz

Natalie Gameson – HERO Co-ordinator

021 936 155 | hero@hrnz.co.nz

Fiona Gillies – Equine Nutrition Specialist

021 825 872 | fiona.gillies@nrm.co.nz

Lillian Bonner – DVM: Integrated Veterinary

021 951 059 | lillianbonnerDVM@gmail.com

Tracey Moir – Seahorse Supplements

027 226 8603 | tracey@seahorsesupplements.co.nz

Join the HERO Community

Share the Journey

- 📷 Post photos
- ❓ Ask questions
- 🏆 Join competitions
- 🤝 Connect with other HERO owners

Join the HERO Owners Facebook group to: – Ask questions – Share progress – Connect with other owners – Enter competitions

We love seeing your updates – photos and stories always welcome.

The HERO Team is here to support you every step of the way.





HERO

Harness Education & Re-homing Opportunities


**HARNESS RACING
NEW ZEALAND**



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114 WRIGHTS ROAD, CHRISTCHURCH 8024 | +64 3 964 1200 | 0508 427 637

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