

Most yards keep to a routine, which can include stable chores in the morning while the horses are turned out



What does the equine behaviourist think?

According to Dr Debbie Marsden, a routine helps a horse to relax as it gives him confidence in his environment.

"A horse can predict what's going to happen, anticipate it, and get his body ready for it, whether that's feed time, turnout, rest, or exercise," she explains.

Understanding this, says Debbie, can be useful in all sorts of ways: "For example, coming in from the field. If horses are always brought in in a certain order, they will learn to organise themselves to facilitate that, which can avoid bullying and accidents around gateways. Another example is picking out a horse's feet. If the owner does them in the same order, the horse will learn to lift them before he is even asked to do so."

However, there can be a downside to this anticipatory behaviour.

"Going' early in a dressage test, or cantering when approaching the canter place on a hack are examples of this," adds Debbie. "That's why the rider should sometimes walk the 'good' canter sections of a ride and only practise parts of a test at a time."

Another downside with a routine is that inevitably things happen to upset it, which can be stressful for the horse. Debbie, therefore, advises incorporating regular, small, planned changes, such as doing things slightly differently at weekends. This way a horse gets used to a little variation.

For horses taken to camps or competitions, Debbie suggests going on "practice" outings to establish an "away" routine.

MEET THE EXPERTS



DR DEBBIE MARSDEN BSc, PhD is an equine behaviourist who advises vets, lawyers and horse owners on all aspects of horse behaviour, management and training. She is also a qualified riding instructor.



CLARE MACLEOD MSc RNutr, is an independent registered equine nutritionist and author. Visit equinenutritionist.com



DR LINDA GREENING is head of inclusivity in Hartpury College's Equine Department, where she also lectures in equine behaviour and conducts research into equine sleep.



DANNY ANHOLT is a Fellow of the British Horse Society and a Centre10 Gold Standard Accredited Coach who specialises in bespoke mentoring programmes for coaches and riders.

"Familiar people and the usual handling, grooming, tacking up and warming up practices all really help."

When it comes to taking on a new horse, Debbie cautions against giving the equine time off to "settle in".

"Be mindful of letting the horse rest after a long journey and act within the limits of quarantine procedures, but horses should be handled and exercised as they are used to from the next day to keep things the same," she says. "Ask the seller about the horse's daily routine. Even tiny details about his grooming habits and tacking up can help the new owner keep some elements of the old lifestyle consistent. Every familiar habit, however small, can be comforting."



Horses love to have familiar people around them



1pm

2pm