

Let's Talk Horse Blankets

The last few days have quickly reminded us that winter is coming. As we prepare for colder weather, it's time to start thinking about our horse blankets. Maybe you invested last winter and your blankets are still in great shape. If so, lucky you! It's always a good idea to give blankets a wash before you store them, but in case you didn't, there's still time. You wouldn't want to wear dirty pajamas, and neither do our horses. If you're washing your blankets, make sure not to try it in your home washer (unless you're lucky enough to have a high capacity, commercial grade washer). Horse blankets are too heavy and big to be successfully cleaned in a typical household washer (sheets and coolers are usually lighter and are ok at home). Before you throw your dirty, hair-filled blanket in the machine, use a shedding blade to remove as much hair as you can from the lining (trust me, it's worth the effort). If the outside of the blanket has a lot of caked on mud or manure, you can hose it down to get as much off as possible before the machine. Most blankets are pretty hi-tech so you should use a blanket wash. You can buy one at your local tack shop (check out our [Sponsors](#) page) or online. If you don't have access to a blanket wash, use a soap designed for delicates. And don't use fabric softener – it isn't good for a blanket's wicking properties. Once the blanket has gone through the high capacity washer at the laundromat, make sure you clean any residual hair out of the machine. I like to lay my blankets out on the lawn to dry, but you can also hang them over the fence or on the stall door. You want to make sure they're completely dry before you fold them up and store them in the tack room or trailer because you don't want them molding!

If your horse's neighbor used your blanket for a snack last winter, or you have one of those horses who takes it as a personal mission to see how much damage they can do to their blanket, you might be in the market for a new winter blanket. Here's what you need to know before you buy a new one. Horse blankets come in three basic types: stable blankets, turnout blankets, and sheets.

- **Stable Blankets:** Stable Blankets are designed to keep horses warm in a stall or stable situation. If you live in a cold climate and your horse spends most of the time indoors, a stable blanket may be the best choice for you. Stable blankets are also a good choice for winter shipping, and are an excellent choice for body clipped horses that are stalled. (Remember, in most climates, a body clipped horse should be kept covered) The important thing to remember about stable blankets is that they are generally NOT waterproof. A stable blanket that is used outdoors in the rain or snow can act like a sponge, soak up water, and actually make your horse colder.
- **Turnout Blankets:** Turnout Blankets are designed to withstand the rigors of pasture turnout- both in terms of weather and horse play! These hardy blankets are generally waterproof, breathable, and made of tough fabrics (and can withstand your hungry stable neighbor). If you can only have one blanket for your horse, a good turnout is probably the best choice. Just because it is made to be used outdoors, doesn't mean it can't double as a stable blanket!
- **Horse Sheets:** Horse Sheets are multi-purpose cover-ups that are used anytime you need lightweight coverage for your horse. Sheets can be used in the summer when you want to keep the dust off, or to prevent sun fading, or in a stall situation when you want your horse clean, but don't need the warmth of a stable blanket. If you show, a sheet is critical for keeping your horse clean and ready for the ring. Some sheets are hardy enough for turnout, but beware, many a horse owner has gone to catch up their horse to find them wearing the tatters of a lovely sheet!

One thing to consider is the turnout blanket's outer shell. That outer shell's resistance to tears (and snacks) is known as "denier." The higher the denier, the thicker the thread and the stronger the material.

- 210 Denier – Very Light Strength
- 420 Denier – Light Strength
- 600 Denier – Medium Strength

- 1200 Denier – Heavy Strength
- 1680 Denier – Extra Heavy Strength
- 2100 Denier – Super Heavy Strength

Now that you've decided on the kind of blanket you need, how do you know what weight to buy? The amount of fill in the blanket determines how warm it will be. The fill can be either Polyfill or Fiberfill and is measured in grams. The higher the weight number, the warmer the blanket will be. Figuring out what weight you need depends on your horse's environment and the condition of your horse's coat. Besides the climate, also keep in mind if your horse grows a light or heavy coat, is body clipped mid-winter, is turned out with or without shelter, or kept in a barn. These are all factors in determining which blanket fill to choose. Here's a "cheat sheet" for you:

- 100 gram fill – light warmth
- 150 gram fill – light/medium warmth
- 200 gram fill – medium warmth
- 250 gram fill – medium/heavy warmth
- 300 gram fill – heavy warmth
- 400 gram fill – extra heavy warmth

Well, that's all fine and good, but what does that mean from a temperature standpoint? (chart from Horse.com)

| Temperature | Horse with Natural Coat | Horse with Blanket |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 50-60 Degrees | Sheet | Light Blanket (100g) |
| 40-50 Degrees | Light Blanket (100g) | Light/Medium Blanket (150g-250g) |
| 30-40 Degrees | Light/Medium Blanket (150g-250g) | Medium/Heavy Blanket (200-300g) |
| 20-30 Degrees | Medium/Heavy Blanket (200-300g) | Heavy(300-400g) or Medium (200-300g) |
| Below 20 Degrees | Heavy (300-400g) | Heavy (300-400g) with Blanket L |

The last piece of the puzzle is size. If you have an old blanket that fits well, just buy that size. Most blankets have a tag in the chest that tells you the size. If you need to measure, it's a lot easier if you have a friend or barn-mate help you (unless you have REALLY long arms). You will need a flexible tape measure to make the job easier and more accurate. First, start by standing your horse as square as possible on a flat, even surface. Place the tape measure at the center of the horse's chest, over the high point of the shoulder. With the tape measure held in place on the chest, run it alongside the horse's body until you reach the rear of the hind leg (the side of the butt before you wrap around the curve towards the tail). For the most accurate measurement, keep the tape as straight as possible along the side of the body without following the contours of the horse's body. If the length falls on a size not offered by the blanket company, then simply round up to the next available size being offered.

As with most things, the more bells and whistles, the higher the fill, and the higher the denier – the more the blanket costs. However, it's better to buy one blanket that will last you a number of years and be just what you need than to buy an inferior product you have to replace yearly because even an inexpensive blanket isn't cheap! Your local tack store owner or online customer service representative is a good resource to answer whatever questions you may have and help you determine the right style and features for you and your horse.

Information taken from: horse.com and equestriancollections.com

Leave us a comment and tell us about your favorite blankets!

On The Bit Meeting – October 2015

We met at Stephanie Gies' house on October 6, 2015, at 7:00. In attendance were Jessica N., Tammy, Jessica F., Kelly, JJ, Ginka, Mary Lynn, Jennifer H., Jane Swanhorst, Grace Hodges, Connie, Rachel, Anna, and Stephanie. At 7:45 the meeting was called to order. Jessica read the minutes from the September meeting. Anna noted that Martha's correct name is Martha Martinez del Rio. Anna moved to accept the minutes with the correction. Connie seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Tammy provided the Treasurer's report. We currently have a balance of \$3541.72 which reflects the \$100 we paid RMDS for our class sponsorship.

Old Business

Banned Substances Clinic

Heather Peterson responded to Stephanie's inquiry and is happy to do a class/clinic for us for the cost of her travel. We discussed possible dates and the group consensus is that November might be good. Stephanie will email and ask her if a Tuesday evening would work for her schedule or if she would prefer a weekend day. Stephanie will send out an email with additional information once she hears back from Heather.

Additional Clinic/Education Ideas

We asked the club to provide us with additional non-riding educational ideas for the winter months.

- Kelly suggested a equine first aid clinic and will get more information on who she thinks would be a good instructor and what the associated costs will be.
- Jennifer H. would like to do a biomechanics clinic. This would be a look at your horse, how horses move, and give you tools to determine what is happening with your horse.
 - The class would likely take 2-3 hours and we would need a room with a projector
 - More information on costs and potential dates at the next meeting
- Jennifer would also like to do a human nutrition class in January. We discussed dates and January 16th is the tentative date for that. Jennifer will get us more information so we can advertise the class to our members.

Board of Governors Meeting

The Board of Governor's meeting is Saturday, November 14th at the Denver Stock Show Complex.

We discussed basket ideas for the silent auction. Mary Lynn suggested things for the horse related to showing and grooming. Her other idea is for each member to contribute money towards a very nice item, like one of the velvet Kentucky pads at the Tack Room, or a pad/ear cover combo. The idea would be to make it something nice that people may not have access to or choose to buy for themselves. Rachel suggested that we should put other small things with it so that it's more "fun," which is the point of a basket. Jessica F. moved that each member contribute \$20 or whatever you feel like you can afford. Drop off your contribution to the Tack Room (or mail them to The Tack Room 1311 S 3rd St. Laramie, WY 82070 – please include a note that it is for the OTB basket). The Board of Governors meeting and the banquet are different days this year. The basket is for

the January 16, 2016 banquet, so we'd like to have contributions by December 15th to give us time to purchase the items and put the basket together. Rachel 2nd the motion. Motion passed.

New Business

2016 Officer Elections

Elections for 2016 officers will be held at our November 3rd meeting. We will prepare an online voting mechanism (like Survey Monkey) for our out of town members. If you are interested in nominating someone, please email the nomination to Stephanie at info@onthebitdressage.com. The deadline for nominations is October 27th. If you have been nominated, Stephanie will contact you for a brief bio to accompany the online voting form. Online voting will be open from October 30-November 2. Proxy or in person voting will take place at the meeting on November 3rd. You must be a member of On The Bit to accept the nomination and have your name placed on the ballot. If you are not a member and are interested in running, you can now renew your membership for 2016 – just make sure you select On The Bit as your group affiliation. If you are a member of another RMDS club, you can request that your affiliation be changed to OTB, but you must do that in October.

Nominations

Anna nominated Stephanie Gies for Secretary and Tammy Au-France for Treasurer. Tammy nominated Jessica Ford for President. Ginka nominated Kelly Wolfe for Vice-President.

Ginka will host our November meeting. Watch for an email with the main dish plans and her address. We ask that everyone who attends bring a side/dessert/beverage to share. Kelly will host the holiday party in December.

Thank you to Jane Swanhorst and Grace Hodges for driving over from Cheyenne for our meeting. We look forward to getting to know you both!

Tammy moved to adjourn the meeting. Grace seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:35.