



Jonathan Chapman is the Chairman of the British Eventing Safety committee



STEPHEN BARDEN/ALAMY

DIETARY DILEMMAS

IN A visit to my feed room I was aghast to see the shelf above the livery's feed bins bowing under the weight of a multitude of white pots and tubs. On inspection we had on that shelf a cure for everything: laziness, buzzyness, stiffness, attitude, breathing issues, hormonal disorders, vitamin deficiency – you name it, we had it. Combine this with bridles that lighten the forehead, bits that make horses jump better and girths that make horses move better, a rider on a horse's back is just about redundant!

I, like most riders, have used various supplements over the last 20 years. I have also tried the odd miracle bit and saddle or numnah. But for the most part you end up trying too many things at once, meaning it's hard to tell if anything is working. In reality they probably just bought me and the horse a little bit of time to work things out. While waiting for the miracle cure to kick in I kept schooling and that was where the results came from. Certain dietary supplements can have a

Jonathan Chapman *discusses the importance of knowing exactly what you are feeding your Event horse*

role to play, but they should be (as the name suggests) a supplement to a properly balanced ration of high quality feeds.

ANALYSE THAT

An Event horse's ration should be made up of 70-80 per cent roughage/fibre (i.e. grass, hay, haylage) and 20-30 per cent hard feed (concentrate). We tend to rely too much on the hard feed portion of the ration to supply all the vitamins and minerals, high quality protein and energy a horse needs, and to ignore the roughage/fibre part. Apart from enabling correct gut function, the roughage should supply most of the horse's dietary requirements.

How many of us have our roughage

analysed so that we know what we are feeding? The feed value of grass will change through the growing season, but hay and haylage stay fairly constant once made (if stored correctly). Some of you may have your feed supplier analyse the hay or haylage for you. They will generally come back with a fairly basic dry matter-energy-protein-ash analysis. But how many supply the full mineral element analysis?

Although only required in small amounts, the mineral elements are essential for correct bodily functions and any deficiency or excess in one or another may compromise a horse's performance. Before buying your supplements, get your roughage analysed to identify any gaps in





FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FEEDING
and the use of supplements in competition,
check the Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Rules
(Chapter 10 of the BE Members' Handbook)

the minerals provided. It only costs £20-£60 for a full analysis. Better still, get your hay or haylage supplier to furnish you with the information.

All bags of concentrate feed sold in this country, by law, must have a label telling you what's in the bag. Large bale haylage, at £50-£70 a bale, is not cheap and should make up three-quarters of your horse's diet. Don't you owe it to them to know what you are feeding them?

SEASONAL VARIATIONS

Energy and protein levels can vary considerably and normally relate to when the haylage is made. Hay tends to be made in July when the standing grass is mature, drier and the weather is more reliable. This mature grass has a lower energy and protein content (lower feed value) than earlier season grass.

Better quality haylage is made in late

May/June, with a high energy and protein value. For most horses competing up to Novice level Eventing, this should supply most, if not all, of their dietary requirements. Horses competing at higher levels require greater fitness and leaner bodies. They may simply not be able to consume the volume of haylage that they need for their protein and energy

requirements, and may require more concentrates.

I was watching a television programme a couple of weeks ago about plough horses working in the early 20th century. It made me realise that our interpretation of 'working' a horse hard and that of our forebears is quite different. Hard work is a pair of plough horses ploughing an acre



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Energy and protein levels can vary depending on when haylage is made





The **FEI Clean Sport Database** is a great tool and can be used to check ingredients and trade names for banned substances. Visit **www.prohibitedsubstancesdatabase.feicleansport.org**



EOIN FUREBANK/ALAMY

Be vigilant when preparing feeds – it can be difficult to prove accidental contamination

a day for weeks on end in all weather. They were fed oats by the bucket load, but they had earned them. Most horses today don't work hard and don't need overloading with energy. To do so causes so many problems to their health (ulcers) and behaviour (schooling).

I am not a nutritionist, I am a horseman who has made many mistakes over the years and has hopefully learnt through experience how to do it right. So my advice is get your roughage analysed and remember the old saying – you are what you eat. Or in this case, your horse will be a reflection of what he eats! 🐾

“*It is easy to understand why many riders are tempted to use calmers*”



KEEP CALM AND READ THE LABEL



Calmers seem to have been in the news in 2014 for all the wrong reasons and their use must be viewed with caution. With the ever-increasing importance of a good dressage test in an

Eventing competition, inevitably there will be pressure to get the horse into the most co-operative frame of mind. It is easy to understand why many riders are tempted to use calmers.

British Eventing's Young Rider team vet, Mark Lucey MRCVS, shares his key thoughts about using these supplements:

- Buy only from a very reputable, preferably UK-based, manufacturer
- Check stated ingredients very carefully against the FEI controlled or banned medication list
- Do not exceed the manufacturer's recommended dose
- Calmers are no shortcut to good basic training of your horse
- It may be dangerous to jump horses after calmer administration – if the intent of a calmer is to take the edge off your horse's reactions, this could have negative as well as positive consequences
- Some calmers and sedatives have a legitimate use in horses for clipping, shoeing, etc, but take very careful note of detection times and work on safe and very conservative withdrawal periods before competition
- Remember, as the rider, you are the primary person who will be called to account if your horse returns a positive dope test result. It can be difficult and very expensive to prove accidental feed or supplement contamination
- If a product you use on your horse results in a halving of its dressage score, it may mean this product contains a banned substance
- General words of warning: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is!
- There are no miracle cures to enable a good dressage test – no bridle, no bit, no saddle, no girth and no supplement is going to suddenly conjure up a 75 per cent test, just a thorough understanding of how to train and ride a horse and the ability to recognise the correct way of going for a horse progressing through the levels. Then loads of patience and hard graft!