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NO SCALE? – NO PROBLEM

There have been a number of articles appearing in various publications recently about rider fitness and how to get back in shape if you've taken the winter off. Of course, getting your horse back in shape is part of the equation, but how do you even know how fit or out-of-shape he is? What is the ideal weight or condition that your horse should be in?

Here are a couple of easy ways to gauge a horse's weight or evaluate his condition.

A **Method 1:**
Size up his shape. Too fat? Too thin? Just right? One measure of the suitability of your feeding and exercise program is your horse's body condition. Take a look at his forearms and gaskins - areas that don't accumulate fat. If they are thin but his torso is heavy, he's probably carrying more than a few extra pounds. You can also rate his body condition according to the following parameters.

He is in fine (above) shape if:

- You can readily feel but only barely see his ribs.
- His neck is solid but not 'cresty'.
- There's no "gutter" down his back.
- The bone at the top of his rump can be felt easily.

He is in particularly good condition if his muscles are also well defined, if he has plenty of energy for his activity, if his coat is sleek and his eye is bright.

He's getting too thin (above near right) if:

- His rump is flat on both sides of his croup, his ribs are beginning to show and his neck has started to narrow.
- His rump is sunken, you can count seven or eight ribs, and he has developed an ewe neck. This horse is well on his way to serious health problems.
- His skin is pulled tight over the bones of his pelvis; you can easily see the backbone bumps along his topline. A horse in this condition requires immediate veterinary attention.

After a winter off of training (or reduced training) most horses we see have the following issue:



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He's too plump (abover right) if:

- He's starting to get a bit 'cresty', it's difficult to feel his ribs and he has a slight gutter down his back.
 - His neck has patches of lumpy fat around the back and rump.
- Other variables can influence a horse's shape. For instance, an abundance of lean muscles – the type most suited to long-distance work – may cause a fit and healthy horse to look skinny, while bunched sprinter-type muscles can make him look heftier than he is.

Method 2: Measure and calculate.

In some cases, you will need a specific estimate of your horse's weight. Dosages of dewormers, for instance, are based on weight, and your horse may carry more or less than what's considered average –generally 1,100 pounds.

To get a more precise reading of his weight, try this method. With a little practice, it can be completed in just a few minutes. Use it at least once a year or anytime your horse seems to have gained or lost weight.

Step 1: Gather a flexible tailor's tape, a pencil, some paper and perhaps a calculator. Many tailor's tapes are 72 inches long. If

your horse is very large, you'll need one that's 120 inches.

Step 2: Determine your horse's girth circumference. Use the tape and measure from just behind his elbow, up over his withers and back under his belly. Write down this number.

Step 3: Still using the tape, measure the length of your horse's body from the point of his shoulder to the point of his buttocks. Write down this number.

Step 4: Use the two measurements to calculate your horse's weight according to the following formula:

$$(\text{girth}2 \times \text{length})/330 = \text{bodyweight}$$

If your horse's girth is 70 inches and his body length is 68 inches, his body weight would be

$$(702 \times 68)/330 = 1,010 \text{ pounds.}$$

And of course – the one consideration should always be the fit of your saddle if your horse has gained or lost weight! Your saddle fit expert can assess how much adjustment needs to be made for your saddle to work with your horse during the training period while getting ready for show season again.

