It seems as winter as officially arrived in Louisiana. With temperatures in the low 20’s many of us are building fires, cooking a pot of gumbo and rethinking our riding plans for the winter. However, don’t let this cold weather fool you, your riding and training goals for the winter can still be achieved as long as you provide appropriate cool-down and recovery for your horses.

Following any length of strenuous exercise it is important to provide adequate time for your horse to cool down. Cooling down involves lowering your horses heart rate, respiration rate, and body temperature back to a resting level before returning them to their stall or pasture. The steps mentioned below will help you create your own cool-down procedure and prevent injury.

- Begin your cool-down by walking for a minimum of 10-15 minutes. Continue walking or exercising at a reduced rate until your horses vitals return to a normal or resting rate.
- Loosen your girth without removing the saddle right away. This will allow the air to cool their back more slowly, reducing the chance of your horse cramping.
- Remove your saddle. If your horse has a thick winter coat, use a curry comb or a towel to ruffle the hair coat which aids in drying.
- Use a wool/fleece cooler to prevent your horse from becoming chilled while their coat is drying.
- While your horse’s coat is drying (with a cooler on) provide them with grass hay. The digestion of the high fiber content in grass hay increases body temperature, reducing the chance your horse will become chilled while still wet.
- Provide access to water. Ensuring that water is not too cold to drink or frozen will increase the likelihood that your horse will stay hydrated during cold weather.
- Once your horse’s hair coat is dry you can remove the wool/fleece cooler and turn him out. If your horse is clipped, blanket them before turn out.
- If you plan on blanketing your horse it is extremely important to make sure they are dry. Heavy winter blankets do a great job of keeping your dry horse warm but they do not allow a wet horse to dry.

Cooling your horse down correctly will affect how quickly he will recover. Proper circulation helps clear waste products associated with exercise and will decrease muscle soreness. Inadequate cool-downs can result in injury and decreased performance. While cooling-down your horse appropriately in the winter may increase the time we are exposed to the elements it is an essential step in maintaining your horse’s overall health and conditioning.
The Battle Against Rain Rot
Dr. Neely Walker, PhD
Equine Extension Specialist- nwalker@agcenter.lsu.edu

The typical wet and humid weather of Louisiana are perfect conditions to increase the risk for your horse to contract the skin disease commonly known as “rain rot.” Rain rot or rain scald (also known as dermatophilosis) is commonly mistaken for a fungal disease, but is actually caused by a bacterial infection. The bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis* which causes the dry crusty lesions, lives dormant within the horse’s skin until the skin is damaged. Rain soaked skin, or skin that is broken, irritated, or damaged by insect bites or trauma is more likely to develop the condition. Heavy winter coats allow excess moisture to stay in contact with the skin causing an anaerobic (lack of oxygen) condition facilitating bacterial growth.

Diagnosis is typically done by visual conformation. Horses with winter coats will develop raised matted tufts of hair along their neck, withers, back, croup, and hindquarters. If not cared for the lesions will continue to grow and combine, creating scabs with yellow-green or gray colored pus underneath them.

The most important step in treating rain rot is to remove the crusty scab like lesions and expose the damaged skin to oxygen. This is usually done by bathing the affected area of skin with some type of antimicrobial shampoo (Betadine, Chlorhexadine, etc) and gently removing the lesions with a brush or curry comb. In more severe cases, additional layers of skin may be infected and will require systemic antibiotic treatment.

Rain rot is extremely contagious. Practicing good hygiene and biosecurity techniques are important to prevent the spread of this infection. Listed below are a few techniques that will help reduce the spread of Rain Rot:

- Groom daily with clean brushes
- Isolate infected horses
- Clean contaminated equipment before using on another animal
- Use an insect spray to reduce skin trauma
- Avoid sharing grooming kits
- Reduce environmental factors when possible (constant wet/humid conditions)

Mild cases of rain rot will usually heal on their own; however it is important to treat all cases to prevent the lesions from spreading and interfering with daily use. If you suspect your horse has a case of rain rot and antimicrobial treatment is ineffective contact your veterinarian.

Horse Tips
Cleve Weisgerber
Central Region Horse Specialist– cweisgerber@agcenter.lsu.edu

All my life, I have been told that if leather gets wet or you want to preserve it, you should clean it with soap and water, let it dry, and then heavily oil it, especially on a saddle. I was told that you take neat’s-foot oil and on the underside of the leathers and fenders, you put it on as thick as it will absorb. I even heard that some people remove the sheepskin under the saddle and dip the entire saddle in a vat of neat’s-foot oil. Maybe you have heard of this idea.

Recently, I visited with one of the premier saddle makers in the United States and he gave me his ideas on saddle care. His thoughts were that if you apply too much oil to leather, it will close up the pours in the leather and it will not be able to breathe. Also, if you put enough oil on the leather that the leather turns black that you have essentially burnt the leather and it will cause it to ruin and crack.

He suggested that the proper way to oil leather, is after the leather has been washed with mild soap and water and let dry, take regular vegetable oil and a paint brush and paint a light, light, light coat on the leather. You can paint this very light coat on the upper side of your saddle and after drying, it will not rub off on your clothes.

I had one concern that the vegetable oil might attract rodents that would chew on the leather, so you might keep and eye out for this.

I don't know if this method works but it makes a lot of sense and seems to be worth a try.
The mornings were cold, but the skies were blue, and it was perfect weather for the 5th Annual 4-H Master Horseman Benefit Trail Ride at the Kirk Guilbeaux Ranch in Cade Nov. 2. About 82 riders participated in the annual ride, meant to be a fun-filled family event with a ranch theme. Major donors included Ranch Outlet in Lafayette, Atlas Feed Mill in Broussard, and 339 Feeds in Erath. Donors provided all the food for the two day event, including gumbo, chili, sauce piquant, and cowboy breakfast. Cooks were Chuck Rasonet, Danny Hebert, Bill Smith, and Benny Thibodeaux. Charlotte Smith (C and G Farm) provided dessert for 100 people. Gwen Pitre and Pat Bellaire provided refreshments. Many other leaders donated time, talents, and energy to make the event successful. This is the major fundraiser for support of the LSU AgCenter's Master Horseman program, which teaches horsemanship to adults, who in turn teach it to 4-H members involved in horse projects. There are roughly 700 Master Horseman program graduates across the state, with 250 in the southwest part of the state.

Trailers started arriving Friday evening, and continued to line up on Saturday morning. Warm-up began at 8:30 am in the main arena, followed by preliminary instructions about safety on the trail. The ride began on schedule, as the group of riders lined out single file to meet trail challenges such as the Big Cypress, Railroad Ravine, Dry Gulch, and Deep Canal Loop, making it back to the main camp for the chili dinner. An auction was conducted, led by Richard Hebert, then a horsemanship clinic was presented by Daniel Dauphin before the group headed out for the afternoon ride. The trails included Bagasse Butte, the Faulk Bridge, Coyote Canyon, and the Guilbeaux 35. Robert Earl Willis and Karen Breaux supervised a trail obstacle clinic, while four teams of four riders each sped along the Pony Express Trail Course, where a baton was handed off on each of four legs of a challenging trail. The finish line was just after a pond swim, which was exciting to watch as wet horses raced out of the water with squeaky clean riders aboard. The winning team was the Penguins, made up of Lani Richard, Hannah Latilais, Jillian Bouton, and Amalie Bouton. Second team was the Mustaches, made up of Zoe Simar, Rebecca and Julie Harris, and Amanda Melton.

After everyone had a chance to cross the pond, the trail ride continued to the Guilbeaux arena, then back to camp where a gumbo supper was waiting, which hungry riders devoured completely. Evening activities included campfire stories as riders relived the events of the day while relaxing around a warm campfire.

Sunday began with breakfast at 6:30, followed by a trail ride to the Breaux 85 pasture, then on to the Alicia pasture to gather the 150 head cow-calf herd. The group received instructions that they were not to holler, scream, crack whips, or chase cows, but walk around and behind the herd to drive them slowly to the main arena, which made the process work smoothly. The younger riders and also mature participants enjoyed the opportunity to perform a useful role in moving the herd to the cowpens, where the cows with calves were separated from the cows without calves, then moved to a different pasture. Everyone got a chance to be part of the “parting out” process, while eating a little dust and keeping mavericks going in the right direction to their assigned pens.

Then it was back to the camp for a sauce piquant lunch and rest before the roping clinic. Yours truly discussed how Ranch Roping is a slower event that uses a longer rope and a slower pace to make working safer and less stressful for the livestock. State Horse Specialist Dr. Neely Walker explained the rules of the 4-H Ranch Roping Contest. Bryan Boudreaux talked about the parts of a rope. Tim LeBas showed kids different kinds of ropes, and how to swing. Robert Earl Willis talked about using a big saddle horn as a clutch to keep from jerking a roped animal, and I covered different loops thrown from different angles, including the overhand, sidearm, backhand, houlihan, and scoop loop.

The roping contest then got started back in the dusty arena, as 16 adults and youth competed in the inaugural event, judged by Daniel Dauphin. Ropers scored points based on quietness in the herd, time to catch, distance thrown, and difficulty of loop thrown. Winner in the adult division was Tim LeBas. Second was Robert Earl Willis. Amalie Bouton placed first in the youth division.

All in all, this year’s Benefit Trail Ride included many thrills, no spills, and much excitement for the families who attended. Next year’s ride is tentatively planned for the first weekend in November, 2 & 3. Make plans now to attend!
Current News – High School Rodeo Association adopts Reined Cow Horse Event

Cleve Weisgerber
Central Region Horse Specialist – cweisgerber@agcenter.lsu.edu

The National High School Rodeo Association has adopted the Reined Cow Horse Event as a rodeo event for the 2014-2015 season. The Louisiana Association has decided to conduct contest at six of the LA. High School Rodeos and one event will be held at a Louisiana Stock Horse Association show.

The event consists of a reining pattern and a working cow section. In the working cow section, the contestant calls for the cow and must box or hold and show control of the cow on one end of the arena. Following the boxing portion, the contestant must drive the cow down the fence and complete a turn in both directions on the fence. This is followed by the contestant driving the cow to the center of the pen and circling the cow in both directions. This completes the requirements of the event.

This year, points accumulated during the year will count toward the event title and points gained at the finals will count toward the event title and toward the All Around title. At this time, boys and girls compete against each other.

For more information, event dates, and rules and regulations, go to the website of the Louisiana High School Rodeo Association.

To contribute your calendar or for more information please contact Dr. Neely Walker at nwalker@agcenter.lsu.edu

Visit us at www.lsuagcenter.com or on the Louisiana Master Horseman Facebook page.

CALENDER OF EVENTS

**November**
1-2 – Master Horseman Benefit Ride, Cade LA
22-23 – Louisiana Stock Horse Association Finals, DeRidder LA

**December**
6 – Clear Creek Stallion Presentation, Folsom LA