

GRACE'S GUIDE...

to safe practice when handling Thoroughbreds:

Part Two

Here we are looking at sensible steps and precautions to take when turning out and tying up to minimise the risk to you and your horse – being one step ahead of problems can save a lot of headaches in the long term!



Safely turned out HEROS horses and (right) leading up safely.

Something as straightforward as turning out or tying up can be a potential hazard, if not done correctly. This is particularly the case if the horse is new to you or the others it is being turned out with.

It goes without saying that before you turn your horse out you have inspected the field or paddock and dealt with any potential hazards.

TURNING HORSES OUT FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH A NEW GROUP

Horses here are always sedated with sedalin gel (available from your veterinary surgeon) the first time they are turned out, either alone or in small groups. We also never turn out more than six horses together, unless they are old boys or broodmares who are very well acquainted.

After administering sedalin gel you need to allow about 20-30

minutes for it to take best effect and make sure the horse looks dopey enough before turning it out. After one day the horse will be much more settled and in tune with his group and surroundings and well aware of the “pecking order” in the field.

Another option is to turn out the new horse in an adjacent paddock to its would-be companions. If they settle well during the day it should be safe to let them in together.

We never leave a horse with a group if it is clearly being picked on and not settling in. If you have any worries, move the horse immediately. In my experience if there is a compatibility problem it may not resolve itself and may lead to an accident. Not all horses get on but every horse will usually pal up with another one eventually.

Try, where possible, to turn out even numbers together – this

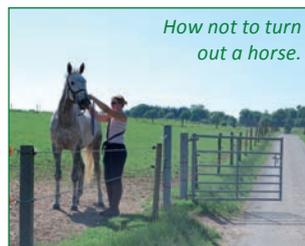


does not always work but is usually the most successful method.

RELEASING HORSES INTO THE FIELD

When turning your horse out walk into the paddock, shut the gate behind you before letting the horse go. Make the horse wait for you to remove the chifney and stand for a moment before letting it go.

It is a good idea to turn your horse's head towards you, whilst standing near a fence; do not allow the horse to start



How not to turn out a horse.

anticipating you letting him/her go or slipping the rope as you go into the field. If you do you could soon end up with a problem and a future dangerous situation on your hands. If two or more of you are turning your horses out together, check that you are all ready to release the horses simultaneously. Make sure you always shut the gate properly behind you.

WEARING HEADCOLLARS WHILST TURNED OUT

We always leave webbing headcollars on horses whilst in the field. I see so many people turn horses out without them and always ask myself the question: “What would they do if the horse escaped?” Firstly no-one would know whose horse it was to return it and if it caused an accident it would be looked on as negligent to have no means of catching the horse as quickly as possible.

My advice is to buy webbing headcollars and leave them on. Special field headcollars that are designed to break quickly are also available. When left out you need to check the horse at least twice, if not three times daily. We have never had a big problem with horses turned out in headcollars, as long as they are fitted correctly in the first place.



CORRECT FITTING OF A HEADCOLLAR

A headcollar can be a problem if it is either too loose i.e. get caught on something; or worse get stuck in the horse's mouth, or too tight and rubs the horse's head causing skin wounds and irritation.

The headcollar noseband, when fitted correctly, should sit about an inch below the “facial crest bone”. It should neither seem too tight or too loose and care should always be taken to ensure a comfortable fit, as with all rugs and tack. Check the noseband is not too loose or too tight either; two fingers should fit comfortably sideways for the correct fit. (See pics below.)

TYING UP HORSES

This is potentially a very dangerous area and where many accidents occur. Please remember that racehorses in training never get tied up outside the stable or to the side of a horsebox or trailer unattended. Never take a gung-ho attitude when tying ex-racehorses up and always be extremely diligent in case the horse panics and injures itself.

Of course, it is very useful to be able to tie your horse up without a problem and if you go about this gradually and gain confidence, never giving the horse a fright, it will quickly become second nature and they will soon accept it.

Key points to follow are: always use a rubber bungee when tying a horse up; this stops them feeling restricted and allows them to pull back slightly and feel the give in the

bungee rope. Horses hate feeling too restrained and that is often the biggest problem when tying up.

When introducing a horse to being tied up attach the bungee to a piece of baler twine on the headcollar. If the horse panics the string will break and nothing



Always starting with two people, we teach horses to stand by a mounting block – one person at the head to steady the horse and one to mount.

else. Be careful what you tie the horse to – we only tie up inside the stable, not in the stable yard or to the side of the horsebox or trailer and certainly not to gates and always to a ring specifically placed for the purpose.

Avoid ever leaving the horse alone when tied up, especially if it is a youngster or one you are tying up for the first few times.

SAFETY WHEN MOUNTING

Racehorses are used to always having the rider legged up and are, therefore, not used to someone putting their foot in the iron and climbing on from the side. Our horses are never mounted from the ground as personally I do not feel it is at all good for a horse's back.

We teach the horses to stand by a mounting block and to aid safe mounting we start with two people, one at the head and one to mount. Practice and patience (as above) make perfect and it really does not take long to get the horse used to this so you can mount from a block unaided.