Welfare of Urban Horses (including Carriage Horses)

What we cover here:

1. Age of horses being introduced to work
2. Teeth
3. Work/life balance (incl. dangers of overworking)
4. Water
5. Diet
6. Worming program
7. Hoof care
8. Suitable tack

1. Age of horses being introduced to work

Horses continue developing and growing until they are six years old, so care must be taken when working a horse that is younger than 6.

4 years old is the earliest a horse should be worked and at this age care is needed to ensure they are not overworked as they are still developing. If horses are worked at a younger age their bones are not strong enough to carry weight and to work on hard ground and doing so can cause much pain and discomfort and lead to many problems:

- Strain and abnormal muscle development
- Bone deformities (bowed tendons, bone chips, bone spavins)
- Splints
- Navicular
- Arthritis/stiffness
- Laminitis
- Stifle injuries
- Blown out hocks
- Hairline fractures
- Severe back problems
- Sprained necks
- Damage to soft tissue in mouth (sometimes irreparable)

Also, discomfort may lead to bad behaviour from a horse who is trying to escape pain (leads to greater difficulty in working your horse and will affect resale value!)

These problems may not appear straight away but when they do they can lead to much suffering for the horse and cost for the owner.

2. Teeth

Importance of ensuring that teeth are growing correctly and not causing any discomfort. Problems with teeth can lead to:

- Pain
- Soft tissue damage to inside of mouth
- Behavioural changes in horses (inability to be worked safely)
- Reluctance to eat (leading to weight loss)

3. ‘Work/life balance’
Dangers of overworking horses:

Similar to that of working a horse too young but also:

- Fatigue
- Exhaustion
- Dehydration
- Pulled muscles
- Muscle wastage leading to pain, disfigurement and an inability to work
- Bad behaviour
- Weight loss
- Depression

It is important for your horse to have some down time, to relax and just be a horse.

Things an urban horse owner can do:

- If possible a horse should be allowed outside to roll and graze (if there is a safe place to do this).
- Even walking your horse out in a head collar and lead rope to have a graze at some grass or just to stretch without their tack on, can be a good thing to do for your horses brain. A horse that is kept inside all the time except when they are being asked to work, can become stressed and depressed.
- Allowing your horse at least one if not two rest days every week is good for physical and mental health of your horse.

The natural environment for a horse is to be outside with other horses and moving a lot, although this is not always possible, its very important to keep in mind that allowing horses company, daylight and movement in their lives helps to keep them healthy and happy.

4. Water

- Horses need a constant supply of fresh clean water
- If horses are working they need to be offered water regularly to prevent dehydration (and lack of energy).
5. Diet

- Horses are known as trickle feeders, their bodies are designed for them to eat little and often.
- Therefore, similar to water, horses should never go long periods without food.
- If horses are working for several hours in one day, rest breaks must be given so that the horse can have a drink and some food (hay/grass).
- Each horses needs to be considered separately when it comes to how much to feed them and wht to feed them. (Age, size, condition, temperament, workload).
- Food must provide them with a balance of forage (grass and hay) and concentrate (cooked mix/cubes/grains) depending on work they are doing.
- Forage makes up the majority of a horses diet, with harder working horses requiring extra concentrate than those that do little work.
- Its important for a horse owner to know when their horse is in good condition or poor condition or over weight and make adjustments to the diet. See BHS Body Condition Scoring pdf for advice on how to determine the body score for your horse.

6. Worming Program

Worms can do severe damage to the intestines of a horse, if a horses is not treated for worms regularly the damage can become irreparable and many otherwise healthy horses die for want of a simple worming program.

It is possible to have your horses worm count measured (checks to see how bad your horse is with worms and what treatment may work best).

7. Hoof Care

What a horse owner can do:

- keep a horses hooves free of stones and mud, especially before riding/working.
- Make sure that your horse has clean dry bedding in their stable as this can affect the condition of your horses hooves, wet beds can lead to foot rot, soft hooves, abscesses; all of which can cause your horse pain and make your horse lame
- If your horse is shod, check regularly for:
  - missing shoes
  - twisted shoes
  - loose shoes/nails
  - cracked hooves
  - overgrown hooves and all the other signs that your horse needs to be shod.
- If you keep shoes on your horse, you will need to have your horse shod every 2-3 months to make sure the horses hoof is the correct shape, the wrong shape of hoof can affect your horses legs and back (imagine walking in high heels all day everyday?)

Before and after a horses hoof is trimmed:

8. Suitable tack (harnesses and equipment to be worn by horses)

It is essential that safe, suitable and well fitting tack is used on all horses. Using old worn tack can lead to breaks when working/riding leading to injury to rider, or if the horse breaks free as a result; injury to others. It is necessary to have tack that fits your horse well for many reasons.

Badly fitting or unsuitable tack can lead to:
• Injury and pain to a horse's head, mouth, neck, back and any other area of the horse it may come in contact with.
• Using anything other than a bit (made of smooth metal or rubber) in your horse's mouth will cause your horse severe discomfort and possibly permanent injury.
• Badly fitting nosebands on bridles can restrict a horse's breathing
• An inability to control a horse which can lead to injury to the horse, others and property
• Challenging behaviour from a horse as an attempt to escape from the pain, discomfort or lack of control caused by unsuitable tack.

**What type of tack is suitable?**

• Tack must fit your horse correctly
• Tack should be smooth and supple, not hard or rough
• Tack is made specifically by a saddler or another who has been trained in the art of tack making, homemade tack is not advised and can lead to many problems especially if made from materials like rope and plastic is unsuitable for use on horses.
• However, even if tack is a suitable size and design for a horse, if this tack is left on a horse for an extended period of time, the horse will become sore and possibly end up with soft tissue damage and scarring. Keeping a horse tacked up for several hours can lead to these injuries
• As with bridles, head collars should also be checked regularly, especially on a young horse who is still growing, head collars can become too tight very quickly and cause severe suffering to horses.
**BASIC CARE FOR HORSES**

**YOUR HORSE NEEDS:**
- Access to plenty of food and water (at least 50 pints of water per day)
- To eat hay in winter (grass has no nutrition in winter)
- To be wormed and have their feet trimmed every 3 months

**AND REMEMBER:**
- Never gallop on concrete
- Never ride a horse under 4 years old
- Never feed a horse cabbage or potatoes
- Make sure head collars aren't too tight
- Don't tie up a horse or leave them alone for long periods