



LEARN TO RIDE/DRIVE AND STABLE MANAGEMENT CONTENT ADDENDUM, DECEMBER 2023

Background and Purpose

Equestrian Canada (EC) is committed to ensuring all its published materials present a high national standard for horse welfare. EC acknowledges the importance of providing accurate and up-to-date information in alignment with current science and best practices. In 2023, EC began an ongoing process of rebuilding the Learn to Ride and Drive and Stable Management materials, including manuals, evaluations, and rubrics. The purpose of this addendum is to address outdated content in the currently circulating Learn to Ride/Drive and Stable Management materials while new materials are being developed.

Addendum Topics

Horse Turnout: Whisker Trimming, Ear Hair Trimming, Mane Pulling

Background

Trimming whiskers and ear hair for aesthetic purposes has been common practice in many equestrian sports. Effective July 1, 2021, the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) banned whisker trimming on the international field of play. The rule change was supported by a memo from the FEI's veterinary committee in 2020. Some National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in Europe have also banned whisker and ear hair trimming in their jurisdictions. While these practices are still permitted by EC, they are not recommended due to their negative impact on the horse's sensory abilities and welfare. These hairs are likely to have a role in spatial awareness and environmental navigation for horses, especially as horses have blind spots directly in front of their foreheads and below their noses¹. Some Canadian provinces have passed legislation that restricts or prohibits these practices. This addendum will amend the current Learn to Ride/Drive evaluation criteria to reduce barriers for candidates.

Traditional mane pulling methods may cause unnecessary stress for horses. Given the limited research available on this topic, EC will remove the requirement to pull manes as part of the Learn to Ride/Drive program. Traditional mane pulling techniques are still permitted by EC, but participants/horse owners are

¹ Hanggi, E.B. & Ingersoll, J.F. (2012) Lateral vision in horses: A behavioral investigation. *Behavioral Processes* 91(1), 70–76.



welcome to employ alternative methods and tools such as thinning blades or scissors if preferred in the Learn to Ride/Drive evaluations.

Locations of Information for Reference

- Learn to Ride – English Level 3-5 Manual
 - P. 24, Rider 4 Overview, paragraph 5: *“Turnout of both horse and Rider should be appropriate to the weather but immaculate. Ears are to be clipped as well as whiskers, bridle path, and feathers on legs. Mane should be pulled to 4-5 inches and ‘laid over’. (All of the above as applicable to the breed of horse.)”*
- Learn to Ride – English Level 6 Manual
 - P. 16, Evaluation Requirements, row 3, Practical Horse Knowledge column: *“Demonstrate pulling a mane and discuss various restraint methods”*
 - P. 100, Chapter Requirements for Level 6, 3rd bullet point: *“Demonstrate pulling a mane and discuss various restraint methods.”*
- Learn to Ride – English Level 6 Evaluation Tool
 - P.1, Evaluation Results, row 3 in Requirements column: *“Demonstrate pulling a mane and discuss various restraint methods.”*
- Learn to Ride – English Level 6 Rubric:
 - P.1, A. Practical Horse Knowledge, row 3 in Requirements column: *“Demonstrate pulling a mane and discuss various restraint methods.”*
- Learn to Drive Rubric
 - P.9, K. Show Grooming/Harness Care, row 5: *“Candidate should demonstrate appropriate clipping of the ears, mane, feathers, and face.”*
- Learn to Ride – Western 1-4 Manual
 - P.8, C. Introduction to Trimming & Clipping Procedures:
Ears: *“The ears may be completely clipped out or simply folded together and the edges clipped. If the ear is completely clipped, the horse should not be turned out for long periods of time as it is exposed to insects and/or cold. The clipping of the ears is purely aesthetic as it offers no physical benefit to either the horse.”*
Muzzle and Eyebrows: *“Clipping the muzzle and eyebrows leaves the head looking clean and well defined but is strictly aesthetic.”*
Mane and Tail: *“Shortening a mane can be done by pulling a thick mane or vertically cutting a thin mane. The result should not appear blunt or choppy. The shortened mane is neater and shows off the horse’s neck, which again is for aesthetics only.”*
- Stable Management (2009)
 - P.24: *“The horse’s mane in some breeds or equestrian disciplines should be pulled. Pulling the mane shortens it while keeping a natural look. To pull a mane, remove a small number of hairs at a time by pulling them out from under the rest of the mane with your fingers. Start with the longest hairs until the mane is level and lies flat. The mane should be pulled gradually over a number of days unless the horse is used to the process. The mane should never be cut with scissors since this produces a very artificial look. Check with your breed association before starting to pull a mane since each breed has its own specifications for turnout and trimming.”*
 - P.32: *“Trimming involves clipping some areas, primarily for appearance. Show horses are required to be trimmed for competition. There may be specific rules or customs for each breed and discipline. Check with an expert or with the breed association before trimming, especially the mane and tail!”*



Whiskers - May be trimmed, but should be left on horses that live out. They are their chief sense of touch.

Ears – Edges can be tidied and long hairs clipped off. The inner hair should be left as this protects against flies and cold.

Bridle path – The length of hair clipped at the top of the mane just behind the ears depends on breed specifications. Many people clip 1–2 inches (2.5–5 cm) here, which allows the bridle and halter to sit comfortably behind the horse's ears. Some breeds require longer bridle paths for competition.

Heels and fetlocks – Can be trimmed for appearance.”

Resolution

EC does not recommend trimming whiskers and ear hair for aesthetic purposes. Trimming whiskers and ear hair is no longer a requirement for the Learn to Ride – English Level 4 evaluation rubric. Evaluators for Learn to Ride - English should ***disregard these criteria when evaluating candidates for English Rider Level 4***. Evaluators for Learn to Drive should note that ***clipping of the ears and whiskers is no longer required for the Show Grooming/Harness Care section***.

Evaluators and candidates should note that in Learn to Ride – English Level 6, ***candidates are no longer required to demonstrate pulling a mane***. Candidates may now choose to demonstrate shortening or thinning a mane using an alternative method, including scissors or a thinning blade if preferred.

Management of Stereotypic Behaviours or “Stable Vices”

Background

Stereotypic behaviours (referred to in the existing published materials as *Stable Vices*) are “repetitive behaviors induced by frustration, repeated attempts to cope, or central nervous system (CNS) dysfunction²”. Some examples of common stereotypic behaviours in horses are cribbing, windsucking, weaving, stall circling, and stall kicking. Studies show that certain management factors such as feeding practices, housing conditions, and weaning method contribute to the development and/or worsening of stereotypic behaviours³. Some horses who develop stereotypic behaviours will continue these behaviours for life. Horses may show reduced expression of stereotypic behaviours after causative factors are investigated and addressed, and physically preventing horses from exhibiting stereotypic behaviours without addressing causative factors can lead to additional welfare concerns.

Locations of Information for Reference

- Stable Management Handbook (2009)
 - P.5, Cribbing: *Once acquired, this habit is thought to be incurable. A muzzle may be fitted to prevent the horse seizing the manger or other objects; however, the horse will not be able to eat or drink. A wind sucking or flute bit may be worn. This is a snaffle-type bit with a straight hollow mouthpiece. The latter has a number of holes so that a gulp of air is dispersed before it can be sucked into the stomach. Perhaps the most convenient and effective preventive measure is the “cribbing strap” (or “cribbing collar”). There are a number of different*

² McBride, S., & Hemmings, A. (2009). A Neurologic Perspective of Equine Stereotypy. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science* 29(1).

³ Sarrafchi, A., & Blokhuis, H.J. (2013). Equine stereotypic behaviors: Causation, occurrence, and prevention. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 8(5).



- designs available. A cribbing strap is fitted around the horse's neck with the aim of preventing the horse from arching its neck and swallowing air. Various preparations are available at tack shops which, when put on the wood, help to deter cribbing*
- P.6, Weaving: *The confirmed weaver is thought to be incurable. Preventive measures that have been employed include cross tying the horse to limit its lateral movement, or the suspending of two bricks on cords so that they interrupt the lateral swing of the horse's head. Not allowing the horse to put its head over the stall door may also help. However, there is little evidence to suggest that any one of these measures is effective to the extent that their severity can be justified. It is probable that the best treatment for the weaver is to give the animal plenty of work and have it spend as much time as possible outdoors. If the habit is constant, the weaver should be stabled out of sight of other horses. However, this might make the horse even more anxious.*
 - P.6, Other Stable Vices table, row 1 “Stall Kicking”, column 4 “To Prevent”: *pad walls, kick chains, toy, elastic and ball, rope*

Resolution

EC recommends that horse owners consult their veterinarian to investigate root cause(s) and determine appropriate, humane treatments and preventative measures for stereotypic behaviours. Often, these solutions involve changes to management practices, such as increased turnout, opportunities for grazing and foraging, enrichment, and social contact with other horses. EC does *not* recommend under any circumstances that horse owners employ prevention methods that could cause unnecessary pain and suffering to horses.

Questions?

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