



A safe return to normality

As the lockdown restrictions begin to ease and there's a possibility we might be able to return to competing before the end of 2020, many drivers will be looking to get back on track with their training again. Here, Sue Mart from Bennington shares her top 12 tips for returning to normality safely and with your horse or pony's best interests at heart.

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1 If you haven't already, now is the time to carry out any pre-season carriage maintenance, making sure your brakes are in good working order and that any scratches are touched up with a lick of paint. Not only will this ensure you head back into your driving with a vehicle that's serviced and safe, but painting and polishing can be quite therapeutic, too.

2 It's essential to carefully check your harness before you get going again and carry out any necessary repairs. Give it a good clean and inspect

it thoroughly, checking all the stitching. Don't forget we stock all the Zilco parts individually, so if you do need to replace any parts get in touch.

3 Your horse or pony may have been turned away during lockdown and if so, it's wise to get his back, teeth and feet checked to ensure he's as comfortable as possible before you recommence work.

4 Don't forget your horse may have lost a lot of fitness, so this needs to be considered, too.

Devise a fitness plan to bring your horse back into work, starting by walking in straight lines and gradually increasing the length of time you work him for.

You can progress to working on suppleness on the long reins or some ridden work before you're ready to harness up again.

5 When you do reintroduce the harness, remember your horse is likely to have changed shape, so ensure the harness still fits and make adjustments where necessary. Check your horse carefully for any

signs of rubbing after work so you keep comfort as your priority.

6 It's worth bearing in mind that some horses may feel a bit spritely after a break, so keep your own safety in mind. Regular turnout will help to keep your horse mentally and physically relaxed and a quick lungeing session allows the chance to settle before you go out in the carriage, if necessary.

Of course, you should protect yourself with a correctly fitted hard hat and hi-viz gear (when driving out) at all times.

7 If your lorry or trailer has been parked up doing nothing for a while, it might need a little attention before travelling horses in it again. Ask your regular mechanic to check it over for you, to make sure it's roadworthy and isn't likely to break down on you during your first trip.

8 Set yourself little goals with your training and write them down so you can keep records of your progress.

The goals you set should be relevant to you and your horse's current level of training, so you may find you have to take a few steps back before you can move forward again.

9 Feed according to the work your horse is doing and monitor your horse's grass intake. If necessary, strip graze paddocks or use a muzzle.

10 Think about working on your own fitness so that you can perform as well as your horse when things get back to normal. Now is the perfect time to get rid of those few extra pounds you may have put on during lockdown and tone up your muscles so you feel on top form. Choose a form of exercise you enjoy so it doesn't seem like a chore and remember devoting a short amount of time daily to do a quick work out is better than doing nothing at all.

11 Be mindful of the ground conditions – our field has been very hard lately, due to the lack of rain - so get creative with walk exercises if the ground is solid.

12 Most importantly smile and enjoy your driving. Be grateful for having our horses in our lives and the time you spend with them.



Monitor your horse's grass intake carefully



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