

Keep your horse fit and healthy throughout the season

By Sue Mart, Photos by Julia Rutherford

In part two of her series, Sue Mart of Bennington Carriages offers some great ways to keep your driving horse or pony competition ready and performing at his best.

During the summer, the extra daylight hours at either end of the day can be perfect for getting your horse fit, especially if it is hot during the middle of the day.

To improve fitness, you need to be getting the horse's heart rate up, but it must be a gradual process so his body can adjust and to avoid injury. It can, therefore, be useful to keep a fitness diary to record details and timings.

Why not make a chart to record your goals? For example, perhaps you want to practise halts. Break your goals down into bite-sized elements and nail one thing at a time. If, for example, you want to get improved marks for your halts, practise until you are happy with the results, then work on the next small goals. Plan in rest days, too.

Today, there are useful phone apps, such as ViewRanger and MapMyRun, which you can use to record speeds and distance. Or you could invest in a FitBit to track your speed, location and

distance. And, of course, there's always the faithful stopwatch if you prefer.

If it is not too wet, a small paddock can be used for schooling. If you are lucky enough to have a few acres with suitable going, cutting a track around the outside, and possibly a figure of eight, offers a nice training circuit.

Finding some new routes with different conditions, such as a few hills, will make training more interesting.

Wherever you train, you can use landmarks such as trees, gateways or buildings to measure, say, a period of trot. Time it the first time, and as fitness increases aim to do the same distance in slightly less time. Although you



Week beginning

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Targets for Week Review

Initial thoughts for next weeks targets:

Make goals each week and write them down to make them more achievable



When it's dry, a paddock is an ideal place for a schooling session



Practise accurate halts by marking out a point in the field



Make exercise more fun by driving across and through different terrain

probably won't want to do too much fast trotting on the road, walking will have the added bonus of helping to harden up tendons.

Finding new routes with different conditions, such as hills and water, will make training more interesting. The British Horse Society website has a section devoted to carriage driving routes, which is useful.

If you can find a few hills to go up, your horse should naturally lengthen

his trot and canter strides. Hill work also helps with fitness, as well as core strength and balance.

As your horse gets fitter, keep an eye open for some good ground, such as sand or bark forestry track, where it is safe to really open him up and push on a bit, which is good for his fitness.

Add variety to training by including lunging work as well as ridden and driven exercise, so you keep your horse fresh and make it more fun for both of

you. And take care not to overdo it on hard ground.

Finally, don't forget to measure your horse's weight once a week, to keep an eye on his waistline, and pay attention to his feeding regime so he stays healthy and can perform at his best. Happy driving!



Incorporate hills into your exercise



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