

HORSE INTERNATIONAL

The professionals' choice

ROUND TABLE:

**ORGANISERS IN
THE HOT SEAT**

**TOP
DOLLAR**

**SHOW
JUMPING'S
RICH LIST**

**NO PAIN
NO GAIN**

**WHO'D BE A
SHOW
ORGANISER?**

**TOP TEN
STALLIONS**
SHOW JUMPING

AT HOME WITH

The Böckmann family

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INDUSTRY UPDATE

by Lulu Kyriacou

IN THE SWIM THE LATEST IN HYDROTHERAPY



As we get ever deeper into the 21st century with all its technological advances, even the horse world must move forward. Despite the excellence of older, traditional methods of horse care that have been proven over time, to reach the top in the current climate means embracing the science that can help keep our horses fitter for longer and potentially at less long term cost. New advances are made weekly in ways to feed and clothe our equine partners, how to train them, what surfaces to work them on and how to treat them when they are sick. This column will look at some of these new advances each month to see what is on offer and how best to utilise them to our advantage, starting this month with physiotherapies.

Horsemen have known for many years that cold water was an effective way to treat certain injuries to both themselves and their horses. In the past this could have been as basic as cold hosing a bruise twice a day or applying an ice pack but now there are much more sophisticated treatments available. Equine swimming pool, water treadmills and portable spas are common in today's competition yards. Swimming is the thing that immediately springs to mind when people think of hydrotherapy, indeed it is still very popular and a centre with a pool is usually within a short

lorry ride of most people. But there are now advances like the water treadmill which can combine the cooling and supporting properties of work in water together with maintaining a much more correct and natural gait. In England the

and books on the subject of horse therapy and works closely with another world expert, Dr David Marlin. At Hartpury the water treadmill is supplied by Activo-med, but a more compact version is also available from a company called

According to Kathryn Nankervis, "Swimming is all very well as long as the horse is a good swimmer. Although they can all swim to an extent, some have more ability, and if they swim badly the horse may create more problems in its muscles

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Hartpury Equine Therapy Centre is the base for leading equine physiologist Dr Kathryn Nankervis who has written scientific papers

Horstrainer Products (www.horse-trainerproducts.com), a Danish company with agents all over Europe.

etc than it solves. We like the water treadmill because as long as the horse is not asked to move quickly on it, it provides a work out that allows the horse to carry his head in the natural position, work over their backs and flex the hocks. We have found it does make the horse place their feet carefully and so enhances the natural rhythm in the pace. The lumbar sacral flexion it creates is particularly useful for jumping horses." The HorseTrainer system allows some incline to be set as well as different speeds which may have some additional benefit for horses with front limb problems. But horses still have to learn to use themselves efficiently on this equipment. "It is a bio-mechanical skill, that horses have to learn and we rarely use it daily in case of fatigue," Katharine explained. "The water provides greater resistance to forward movement but also slows and lifts the limb, which creates a different movement pattern which you hope will be used by the horse on land. However, we would never advise anyone to use these machines without support from a vet and/or a physiotherapist as they could do harm if there is any undiagnosed suspensory desmitus, for example." Hartpury have had some success treating laminitic horses with the water treadmill as well as the more obvious soft tissue tendon and ligament damage because the combination of cold water, plus some weight bearing support encourages afflicted horses to move more freely, which aids circulation and recovery.

HYDROTHERAPY SPAS

The other large item often seen these days is the hydrotherapy spa, supplied by companies such as CET Horse Spa (used by Rodrigo Pessoa, Alvaro Miranda and Markus Fuchs) and Horse Spas UK (www.horsespasuk.com), whose clients include William Fox-Pitt and Jos Lansink. The effectiveness of these units is dependent upon the temperature and salinity, of the water and the pressure of the jets





Hydrotherapy spas are popular fixtures at many stables.

that agitate the water around the horse's legs. Carl Hester's Olympic mount Escapado was a famous beneficiary of treatment in one of these just prior to the Games when the horse sustained a minor injury and looked uncertain to compete.

SEAWALKER

Exercising horses in the sea and horse walkers are ideas which have been both around for many years now and so in some ways it is surprising that the latest development on the hydrotherapy scene has taken so long to be invented. The Seawalker, which combines the best aspects of the horsewalker, spa and water treadmill, seems obvious now but five years ago when race horse owner Eamon Willmot came up with the plan, there was nothing like it on the market. Turning to Justin Chittenden of Equine Health

Centre (www.equinehealthcentre.com), who had provided Willmot's establishment, Horses First Racing, with other services, they decided to combine what they considered to

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be the world's best horse walker with a saline spa to get the Seawalker. Research led them to a Dutch company called Belebro (www.belebro.com) run by Pierre Bens and his partner Wim Helmink. Belebro who had supplied over 1400 of their light weight horse friendly walkers and Wimott and Chittenden were keen to use it as part of their development. “The Belebro way is

to do the best for the horse and then the horse gives its best back” explained Justin's wife Marie-Louise. “We have built several Seawalkers (there is one at a rehabilitation center in Holland and another in Dubai) but we needed Pierre's input as this was not our area of expertise originally. Things like the filtration system have been a work in progress.” The filtration device is one of the main technical elements which keeps the water clean and at the correct temperature and salinity. This means the water can be reused instead of being drained (and wasted) every day to keep it free of faeces and other dirt carried in by hooves. The impact of their invention on the environment has always been a concern to the Seawalker's creators so it was not long before they realised a roof

over the machine was also required to maintain the even temperature in different weather conditions and prevent evaporation in the sun. This might have led to the interior becoming rather damp and humid at times but the Belebro walker is hung from a mechanism above the horse's head and this ‘top spin’ design maximises the space and, together with its open sides,

ensures the circulation of air is excellent as the horses work.

CHEST DEEP

Depending on the type of track around which the horses walk, the water can be filled to various depths to increase or decrease the resistance and cooling properties. In Dubai the water is chest deep as the Seawalker is used as a training aid to condition endurance horses where keeping the horses cool while doing appropriate work is almost as important as the therapeutic effect on the legs. Mary Bromiley, one of the world's pioneers in equine physiotherapy and rehabilitation has been much impressed with the Seawalker and has included it in the latest edition of her book, ‘Equine Injury, Therapy and Rehabilitation’. “We are seeing horses being inappropriately conditioned on many occasions now as not enough time is taken to bring the horse into full fitness. For example, so called warmblood horses have a higher proportion of slow twitch fibres which take longer to respond. Consequently, we see a high proportion of injuries often in younger and younger horses because this conditioning is not always appropriate to the work that is required from the horse subsequently. I have been very impressed with the Seawalker because as well as the obvious benefit of the osmotic effect on swollen limbs, the ability to change the depth of the water means the horses can be worked in different ways. Deeper water provides more



The Seawalker combines the best aspects of the horsewalker, spa and water treadmill.

resistance and therefore works the base of the neck, back and hind quarters for greater core stability. Shallow water provides limb resistance only and works entirely different muscles.”

Marie Louise Chittenden continued; “Eamon is a racing man and we use it for that purpose, but obviously it has the same benefits for other disciplines as has been discovered by users in Holland and Dubai. We have found we have less tendon injury since we have been using it, but obviously that is purely anecdotal evidence and we are hoping in the near future someone like Mary will do a study to find out precisely what the benefits are.”

The Dutch centre that owns a Seawalker, Health4Horses, is open to the general equestrian public and is used by a number of international riders (Jurgen Stenfert, for one) from all the major disciplines where sessions can start from as little as €30 per horse.

ZAMAR MACHINE

Obviously the Seawalker is not a cheap item and unless you are lucky enough to live near one, at this point other therapies are possibly a more convenient option. Kathryn Nankervis and her team therefore make good use of another recent arrival on the equine therapy scene, the Zamar machine. This very portable unit sends chilled (or heated) liquid to pads which are attached to the horses legs. “We have used it in situations where you need cold and compression together and found it to work very effectively” said Kathryn. This sentiment was echoed by Lucinda Fredericks, together with husband Clayton. “It has become part of our regular horse care. We think it has made a difference, enough so that we use it on all of ours after galloping or jumping, as a preventative measure, not just for injuries, and on all four legs. We take it to three day events where it can take the place of constant ice applications, especially as the supply of ice is often limited at some events. We love it, it has certainly been a worthwhile investment and although we haven’t had a need to use it warm, I could certainly see how you could, especially on an older horse with a touch of arthritis.” John Whitaker has also described the product as ‘brilliant’. Zamar have installed an FEI approved regulator to maintain the temperature and make sure the



Aqua trainer.

unit cannot be open to abuse from excessively cold temperatures or over long treatment periods. Team Fredericks have also recently invested in a normal treadmill and Swiss show jumper Christina Liebherr is another who has used one for years as part of her exercise regime. Now uses are being found for these items as part of diagnosis in poor performance cases.

HIGH SPEED TREADMILLS

At Hartpury the high speed treadmill is used by resident vet Tim Gales in conjunction with an endoscope and the latest computer technology to look at loss of performance while galloping. The horses stay for three nights (as use of the high speed treadmill requires a little training) and the vet is able to watch the inner airway as the horse gallops while sensors monitor the heart and provide a real time correlation between these aspects on a nearby the computer.

COMMUNAL SERVICES

Both Hartpury and Health4Horses (www.health4horses.nl) offer a range of therapy services and such centres are becoming much more common. But the consensus of opinion among them all is that one therapy is no good if used in isolation.

Leading osteopath Elizabeth Launder who regularly treats horses at Hartpury was careful to emphasise this.

“The primary goal of my speciality is to improve the range of movement but you cannot treat one symptom on its own. All programmes should depend on diagnosis from vets and therapists working together. For example, osteopathy helps create a range of movement, then other treatments can develop the musculature to enhance and support it.”

Among those other treatments are the latest in gait analysis and training aids. The former is a system developed by Dr Diana Hogkins MBE called Pegasus Gait Analysis (www.etb-pegasus.org) which fits sensors into specially adapted boots and then sends information to a nearby laptop. This product, which a layman can be trained to use in an hour, means that the horse’s action can be minutely examined as the animal performs its regular or competitive exercise. The advantages of this, trotting your horse up over a sensor pad, are easily imagined. “As well as the computer results we also video the work at the same time so the rider can see what we see and relate it to what they are feeling underneath them. This is all used to evaluate the stride pattern very accurately, so we can spot problems very quickly,” commented Dr Hogkins. The efficiency of the product has been demonstrated by its use in several published scientific studies on stride parameter. Although the entire unit is quite expensive

(approx Euro 6000 for laptop with preloaded software, manuals, boots etc) individual sessions can be booked with the company for as little as 65 euros.

VIBRATORS

Vita-floor is another therapeutic aid supplied by Equine Health Centre and is a vibrating floor that can either be fitted into a normal stable or used on a treadmill-like pad. The movement of the vibration has a massaging action and has been effective in maintaining good circulation particularly in horses on box rest. Training aids are always appearing but both Kathryn Nankervis and Elizabeth Launder have been impressed by the EquiAmi (www.equiami.com) which can be used for riding or lunging. Although superficially looking somewhat similar to items such as the Pessoa Training Aid, the continuous complete loop that the EquiAmi comprises of has been deemed sufficiently different to be awarded its own patent this year. Young event rider Rosie Thomas is also a great fan and has been regularly using it on her advanced eventer, Barry’s Best. The horse jumped clear cross-country at Badminton and Burghley in 2009 and was placed ninth at the latter. The EquiAmi is designed to mimic correct contact and encourage the horse to work softly over his back and into the outside rein and the staff at Hartpury have liked the gentle way the aid appears to achieve this.

Please do contact the centres and manufacturers mentioned for detailed advice about any treatment or therapy mentioned in this article.<<



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