



## Training the Arabian Racehorse

Arabian Racing may be relatively new to Australia but in many countries around the world it has had its own identity for decades with many dedicated breeders formulating a type and pedigree aimed at racing the Arabian athlete. Here in Australia we don't have generations of Arabian racehorses. We do however, have many dedicated and leading breeders of the Arabian horse and most importantly, some of the world's best horsemen and women. That's where we are able to start, not worrying about the pedigree, but concentrating solely and wholly on an athletic type.

### First Preparation

When training any racehorses it's good to have a preparation in mind and work backwards from the horse's first race start. The biggest part of any preparation doesn't cost anything, because that is patience. Be patient and don't rush things, let the horse tell you how it's handling the training, ie how it's eating, its condition, recovery and overall look of wellbeing. Now if we have a horse who comes to us for Arabian racing and it's had no real work (such as being newly broken in or sitting in a paddock) initial prep will be all about muscle conditioning, bone conditioning and aerobic conditioning. This prep may last for 10 to 12 weeks and a lot of the hard work is done in this time, both mentally and physically. In the first four weeks we start introducing the horse to a routine of daily work, consisting of 1500m trot and 1500m of canter ridden out in the morning. The afternoon consists of either a swim or a 15-20 minute walk. In the first month the horses are ridden out in twos and threes to educate them and encourage competitiveness with the horses beside them and starting to simulate positions they may be in during a race as part of the mental education. Every second afternoon they are walked through the gates (starting barriers). This is important, not something to be left to the last minute, and it is best to start when they are not over fit and have them very confident with the gates. Walk them in without a rider first, give them time and let them stand in the barrier and then walk them out, moving on to adding a rider and then walking out, trotting out and cantering out, going forward with this process as the horse becomes more confident. Remember, a race can be won or lost at the gates. If the program is going well, in weeks 4 to 8 the ridden work can step up to a 2000m trot and 2000-2500m canter and continue the swim or walk (in the afternoon) from the initial program. The only alteration is in weeks 6, 7 and 8 when once a week you will substitute a slow day with a pace work day twice a week (say Tuesday and Saturday). On these days warm up with a 1400m trot then canter off from the 1000m mark, at the 800m mark pace work at 18 seconds per 200m. This is where good track riders are very important for timing, so that the horse is finishing off with 800m of work at 18 seconds per 200m or 72 seconds for 800m. Try and work in pairs for competition.

### Weeks 8-12

Slow work days remain mostly the same in this month, if you have access to hills, trails or the beach, mix the work up with that but don't over work the horse. I always like my horses

to be on the fresh side, and Arabians like their work a little mixed to keep their mind interested and fresh. By this time you should have a good understanding of your horses and can change things to suit your individual requirements. Weeks 8-10 increase pace work tempo to 16-17 seconds per 200m and keep that work to 800m. Weeks 10-12 back off the slow work days, keeping your horses well and happy. These last two weeks we can let them finish their work off so kick off at the 800m mark at 16 seconds per 200m, slowly improving the tempo from the 400m mark. Let them gallop say 13.5 seconds per 200m but don't let them off the bit (remember we have to teach them their best work should be the last 200m). These sectional times are a guide only, good riders can tell you where they are at and how they feel, and that is always the best guide of all. Now some may have a spell at this stage, but some may thrive and have another 2-4 weeks work. I feel it is always best to spell a horse when it's going well and sound rather than to push too far and have to spell because the horse becomes sour or tired, but again, only you can judge that.

Just a note, you can go right through a first prep and then race but it takes a very good horse to cope with all that mentally and physically and you have to be very much aware of how the individual is coping with it all.

If your race horse has gone out for a spell with no problems then a spell of only 4-6 weeks is all that is needed. Some residual fitness will still be there when returning to work.

Our spelling time has passed and it's time for training to recommence. A couple of things I like to do straight away is a stomach drench worming as it is very thorough and also do a blood test which enables me to see if the horse is lacking in any area of it's nutritional needs. The blood test gives me a good guide as to what we have to train on.

If everything goes to plan (and with horses it sometimes doesn't), they should settle back into work for 2 weeks before starting pace work then  $\frac{3}{4}$  pace work. Just monitor their attitude, eating habits and so on. As training intensifies, and you are working over 1200m at  $\frac{3}{4}$  pace, you will become a little more aware of how all the parts of the training are progressing.

For example, I like to do trot ups in the afternoon particularly after a fast work day to make sure that we don't have any sore sports and that the horse is sound in it's action. I really look at the hamstring, girth and rib muscles and back and upper hind quarter muscles. All joints are checked and flexion tests are done and the horse is also checked for any indication of heat in the legs. We pay a lot of attention to these muscle groups. Remember that your horse is an athlete and should be treated as one. That is why we use a lot of deep muscle massage therapy, Equissage and acupuncture to keep our horses supple and free. We also consider the horse's shins as shin soreness is brought about by speed. I have had horses that have come from endurance commence racing who go shin sore. You may say that's not possible with all the hard work endurance horses do on hard ground for many miles, however shin soreness is mostly associated with speed. So generally it comes down to a speed related issue as a horse cannot gallop well when shin sore. Something to look for in conformation is long forearms, short cannons and good flat bone that is not too fine as fine-boned horses will be highly susceptible to shin soreness.

We take blood every 2 to 3 weeks to look at white cell levels (white cell levels tell us whether we have an infection or virus in the body system), red cells are our haemoglobin and we look for a good range present. The blood test also notifies us of electrolyte levels, whether we need more or less, and also shows potassium levels which are very important for muscle function. If a blood test seems daunting don't worry, a good vet can take and

send it for results and then interpret these results back to you within a 24 hour period.

A point I haven't touched on is riders and horse partners during fast work. Riders with good knowledge are hard to find but very important and as influential as the trainer, strapper and horse itself. I like my gallop riders to be 55-65kgs. It's easier for a horse to flatten out and gallop with that weight than say 75-85 kgs. I know what weight I would prefer to carry in a gallop and we are talking a track gallop not a trot or canter.

Partners in gallops when our horses are learning. I like to use a thoroughbred ex-racehorse that is retired from racing as a partner. If they are tractable it gives our Arabians the best partner to learn from. The thoroughbred has been there and done it before so our Arabians can sit beside them in a gallop and follow the tempo of the gallop and learn. I know that it's not possible for everyone and it's not the be all and end all but it does make the job easier than trying to teach two Arabians together, particularly to pick up the attributes of  $\frac{3}{4}$  pace then hitting the line at a gallop. A good Arabian racehorse will run 10 seconds slower than thoroughbreds over 1200m so don't expect your horses to be running the same time as a thoroughbred. A breakdown of a training track gallop as a guide with an Arabian is:

You want to be improving sections without the horse being outside it's comfort zone 1200-1000m (16.5 s), 1000-800m (16.5 s), 800-600m (16 s), 600-400 (15 s), 400-200m (14.5 s), 200m-finish (13.5 s).

By race time they will need to be 75-80% fit so that there is room for improvement with racing and so you don't push too hard too early and have your horses prepared any earlier than required.

## **Feeding**

Feeding a horse is a simple thing, good, high quality feed which is clean and dust free. There are so many feed products available on the market to confuse us but I'm old fashioned so I feed high quality grain, chaff and liberal lucerne hay. I have my horses on an average of a 12-14% protein diet which consists of oats, barley, corn, sunflowers, lupins and lucerne. In grain weight they would eat approx. 5 – 6 Kg a day plus lucerne chaff, the additives we use are electrolytes, vitamin E, selenium and additional potassium. There is no tried and true feeding program, the main thing is a diet that holds condition, produces good muscle development and health.

## **Race Day**

Race day should be an exciting and easy day, all the hard work should be done, with plenty of time to the start prior to the race (which is the required one hour). Allow some extra time so as not to rush. Remember that you have to get your colours to the jockey's room so work out where everything is so you are not rushing.

Have a thorough knowledge of all the rules of racing and be confident in saddling up on race day. Having the jockey's gear on correctly is paramount they are putting their lives in our hands. Be aware of the breastplate length and weight bags, non-slip pads etc as all must fit correctly and be tight before leaving the saddling area as we don't want to be correcting

anything in the mounting yard. Sometimes a jockey will send out a girth that may be too long. Jockeys carry different sized girths so don't be afraid to ask for a shorter one or ask for help from someone near-by, we are all there to help one another for a successful race day.

In conclusion:

Don't get too overwhelmed with the technical side of this article, the largest part of racing is the horse's natural born ability and from a training point of view, patience, commonsense and horsemanship. If you have your horse fit and healthy with no soreness, you should be happy that your horse will be able to work and train to it's best ability. Remember however not to overwork or over stress your horse as that is the quickest way to end your preparation for a race.

Right at the moment we are in a very exciting period for the purebred Arabian horse in Australia due to the hard work over many years by all those at NARA (National Arabian Racehorse Association). Without their persistence we would not have the opportunity to show case our Arabian racehorses.

Good Training and Good Racing

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