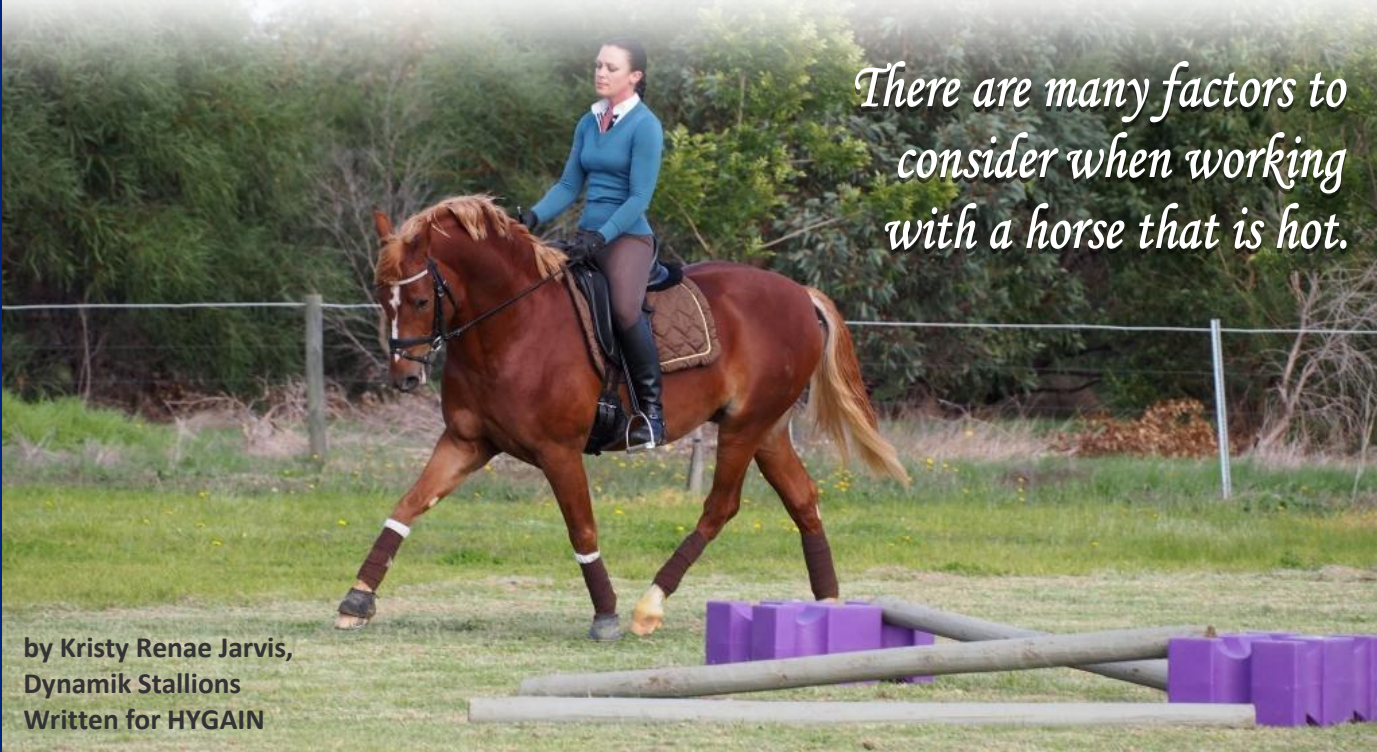


Exercises to calm the hot horse



There are many factors to consider when working with a horse that is hot.

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If you have a horse that normally has a laid back character and has now become hot, then you need to consider if there is an underlying issue.

The first point of call for me would be to have an equine body worker look over your horse and check for any sources of pain in the muscles. Many times you will find that horses react in a hot way when they are in pain. A good equine body worker can also advise you if they think there are any issues with your saddle fit that could also be creating more problems. Your equine body worker may recommend that you seek advice from your veterinarian if they feel that there is some kind of underlying issue such as joint pain.

Remember to always consider that your horse could have issues with their teeth, if the hotness is out of character consult your Equine dentist. For example, your horse could have molars that have erupted and created cuts or ulcers on their cheeks. At Dynamik Stallions all of our performance horses have their teeth done at least every six months by a Master dentist. This is essential to performance because dental issues can create a poor contact and in turn issues with the TMJ, poll and then various muscles in the body.

Consider gut issues, most of us are aware that many horses suffer from ulcers and they can become very hot and react to the leg in a negative way due to gut pain. I recommend having your horse scoped to find out if Ulcers are present and then start a course of Ulcer medication dispensed by your veterinarian to ensure that the Ulcers are healed. There are many supplements available on the market today that can also help with ongoing maintenance to deal with your horses gut.

Another consideration is mycotoxins, Hygain have a new product in a pellet form aimed to bind Mycotoxins in the gut called Safeguard. Trial the products for two weeks to see if there are changes in your horse's behaviour and if so continue with the product for another few weeks. Mycotoxins can cause horses to be girthy and sensitive to the leg among other symptoms. See the Hygain website for more information about Hygain Safeguard.

Most important of all, consider your horses diet! You need to consider your horse's temperament, body condition and the amount of work your horse is doing every week in order to create a suitable diet. My main advice is keep the diet simple! Do not get carried away with feeding too many supplements as there are many complete feeds available on the market that can cover all your horses' nutritional requirements that have been developed by expert nutritionists. From there, all you need is good quality fibre sources. Take advantage of gaining advice through programs such as Hygain's Nutrikey, free advice on your horses diet is available to ensure you are feeding the right type of feed to your horse and that your horse's diet is balanced.

Is your horse hot from the point of view that it has a sensitive and reactive character? I really enjoy working with horses that have a sensitive character. I find that with the correct work and forming a trusting relationship with these types of horses can be very rewarding. They are often very willing types to work with once a bond is created and trust is formed.

If the hot horse in question is a new horse that you are working with, then taking the time to know the horse and doing some ground work exercises would certainly be beneficial. Your aim would be to establish some trust and also to assess what factors tend to make the horse hot or reactive.

I would also advise to lunge a hot or fresh horse, however this lunging must only be for a short period of time. Lunge your horse gently at walk and trot until you see the horse relax and watch how your horse is reacting. The aim is for your horse to start to drop the neck and start to swing a little in the back and then you know that when you climb on board a little relaxation is already starting to be achieved. The tail is also a good indicator of how your horse is feeling, the tense horse could have a tail that is really clamped into its buttocks and the very fresh horse can have a very high tail carriage. Continue lunging and working with your horse on the ground until you see the tail is in a relaxed normal position. This is a great tip for dealing with a horse that is hot and fresh at a competition to work out when is the right time to climb on board.

So now from a riding perspective, the most important factor to me is for the rider to develop an awareness of their body. Are you gripping with your leg? A hot horse will become hotter if you grip with your thighs and calves and a lazy horse will in fact become lazier. You must remind yourself to keep your legs loose and only apply a leg aid when you need to. Constantly nagging your horse with your legs will make a hot horse hotter. Eventually all horses will become dull to your aids overtime if you are constantly kicking and pressing with your legs. When you ask your horse to react to your leg, get a reaction and then leave them alone again. Really make a conscious decision to check that you are not gripping with your legs during your ride, loosen your leg and hip joints. Of course horses are really big animals, but you will be amazed how much they react to gripping and pressing legs! At the end of the day we want the horse to react in a positive way and we want to be able to get a reaction from them easily, especially as they are moving up the levels. Aim for less is more and become aware of your own body, this will make for a happy horse. This tip will also be helpful for those riders who find that their horses become hot at competitions, quite often the rider will be tense and grip with their legs which will only exacerbate the issue.

Make your aids clear! This is an essential factor to training any horse however too many unclear aids will make a hot horse become even more hot and nervous. If you are not clear and simple with your aids this will only create confusion.

Are you applying too much pressure through your rein aids? Creating a good connection to your horse's mouth will help to create relaxation and trust. Work on having a nice connection and concentrate on your elasticity coming through your elbows. Keep your hands down and still to encourage your horse to want to work into the connection.

Find a routine that works for your horse. The warm up is an important phase of schooling so you need to find a routine that suits your horse and then take this same routine to the competition. This will help your horse to gain confidence as your horse will understand what is required.

During your training session under saddle if your horse becomes hot, go back to the basics. Make some clear and simple transitions and focus on the basics and making your horse straight. Riding transitions on the $\frac{3}{4}$ line between walk and trot can be an effective tool to calming your horse. I do not recommend introducing the halt transition until your horse is relaxed and swinging and feeling confident.

I would also use some figure of 8's to calm the hot or fresh horse. The bending and turning can help your horse to start concentrating on your aids and become a little deeper and more relaxed in the frame.

Shoulder in exercises can also be very useful especially when the horse is spooky. Putting your horse in and out of shoulder in on the large arena track can ensure that they are on the outside rein and starting to listen to your aids and become more focused. The shoulder in exercise can help to unlock the wither and in turn help to relieve tension.

The most important factor is to be flexible. If your horse is feeling particularly hot and fresh in a schooling session then concentrate on achieving relaxation. If a particular exercise is making your horse even more tense and hot, then take a breather and do something else. Maybe you can achieve enough relaxation and swing in your horse's body to then use this freshness and power! A horse being fresh or hot is not always a bad thing, it's all about how you use the energy.

At the end of the day, you need to experiment and find what is right for your horse at its stage of training. As the trust builds with the hot horse you will be able to achieve more. Always take your time, never push the horse too far and undo all your positive work. There will always be periods of time where you feel you have to go "backwards" with the training of your horse and go totally back to the basics for a period of time. If you are patient and do this, the reward will be much bigger in the end.



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