

EQUINE NOTES FOR MAY 2018.

Horses and dogs have been man's most intimate and faithful companions since the dawn of history, but the horse has certainly been the most useful. In sport, agriculture, transport and warfare, the horse has contributed more to human pleasure, ambition and progress than any other animal. HRH Prince Phillip.

Hello Again,

Hooray!! A light has come on again in the sky. Is it the sun at last? I had almost forgotten what it looked and felt like. How the spirits rise and everyone is smiling. A wet winter and an even wetter spring has left the land sodden. Let us pray for some sunshine, a bit of warmth and freedom from continually drying out horses, dogs, boots and clothes. I even sacrificed an old stable mat, laying it down in a gateway to save the horses sinking in mud. Sid has spent most of his days inside the field shelter with just his head poking out viewing the world. At least he has been fed his hay inside in the dry. Ziggy and Oscar have far thicker skins and coat and don't seem to mind the elements but both are now losing their coats and the birds are gathering it up to line their nests.

The latest edition of British Horse, the British Horse Society's magazine arrived through my door yesterday and I was so pleased to read that road incidents involving horses were down in 2017. Only 404, with eight equine deaths and 74 injured horses, one carriage driver killed and 94 riders injured. I say ONLY with tongue in cheek. More than a quarter of riders were subject to road rage or abuse and 84% of incidents occurred because the vehicle was too close to the horse. These might be just numbers but every incident is heartache for someone and a lot could have been prevented with knowledge, patience and thought. Often I have been riding down a quiet country lane and heard a vehicle approaching at speed, and I prayed they would on rounding the bend, see me in time, and be able to stop before ploughing into my beloved horse. On one occasion I had my stirrup knocked by a car passing too close- it could have been a breakable equine leg, which would have meant death to my steed, and on another occasion I was so annoyed with the driver of a thoughtless car, that I hit the roof as it passed with my stick. It amazes me how wonderful horses are to become accustomed to the frightening motors and sights they encounter. Most Tractor drivers and large lorry drivers are considerate but on the whole car drivers think that because they pay a road tax, that they own the road. How much nicer and happier it would be if we could all acknowledge each other's pleasures and learn to be civil.

Patience is a virtue, possess it if you can, seldom found in women, never found in man.....

The British Horse Society's recommendation to drivers is

- 1 Slow down to a maximum of 15mph
- 2 Do not sound horn or rev the engine
- 3 Overtake only when it is safe to do so, ensuring at least a car's width is left between the vehicle and the horse.
- 4 Be Patient- drive away smoothly without revving the engine or sounding the horn.

Horse riders could really help by genuinely thanking considerate road users for their patience, and wearing Hi- Viz clothing, which allows drivers an extra three seconds to spot and make allowances for unpredictable equines.

June is the traditional time for making the best hay but of latter years most of mine, due to the changeable weather has been made and gathered in August. Long range

weather forecasts are so much more reliable now, and farmers, spotting a few days of good hot weather work all hours to amass the winter's fodder. It takes less days of hot sunshine to make silage or haylage as the grass only has to wilt before being wrapped in polythene to preserve it. The only problem is if rats chew the covering and let in the air, the contents then become rotten, uneatable and potentially lethal.

Pony Club rallies, Camps, Shows and Gymkhanas are now in full swing, and summer holidays are on the horizon. What enjoyment our equines give us, and how most children need to thank their parents for the devoted help freely given, enabling them to have that enjoyment. Whether it is money to keep the animals, time to help look after them, or even transport them, parents are irreplaceable and should be appreciated.

So far this month I have had no welfare problems to deal with and hopefully it will remain problem free, but please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns about equines near you which you feel are being abused and need help. I am at the end of a phone and can discuss, help or advise in confidence.

I am here on behalf of the British Horse Society, as a welfare contact.

Heather Lee BHS contact for E. Devon and W. Dorset.