



AN ARTICLE BY MAGGIE PATTINSON

WHAT TO DO IN WINTER

Well the season's over and there's the decision of what to do now - there are various schools of thought and all have their pros and cons - so thought we could just look at a few of the options!

There's the Old School - shoes off and out, I still know Event people who do just that. It is only really a possibility if you have enough room and enough grass and probably wouldn't suit an older horse. The pros: the horse gets complete rest - can be a horse - grows a "woolly" (hopefully) and gets some "foot" rest. The cons: most of us don't have enough room, not enough grass anywhere - not many horses are "tough enough" to be out with nothing on - the ground is either so hard it can break hooves up or so soft that they rot & get mud fever! - for any REAL benefit from this you would need to be looking at 3 months and then it's bringing them back from scratch i.e 4 - 6 weeks walk work - then 2-4 trot work before introducing canter back.

Ticking Over - most horses benefit from this one: the pros: you can let them down enough to get a good coat - have a bit of a rest but still keep having the odd hack and schooling session - you keep in touch with how they are - this definitely suits the older person, keeps their joints moving and their muscles toned. The cons:

possibly difficult to let down the "excitable" ones - you still need to do some serious "back to work" training - but no real cons.

Change of Scene - this is probably suitable for those who need their "minds" occupied (the excitable ones) - youngsters who don't really need a rest and those who maybe had a short season for one reason or another. You can really work on the Schooling aspects (that's the area that sometimes gets "left" because there's always somewhere better to be!) Maybe work towards some Dressage or Indoor Show Jumping - it's still hard work for them but of a different kind and with lesser physical stress levels (or physical stress in different areas) (for the horse that is). It's a good time to improve how you both work together and will improve your partnership for the next season.

There are no real rights or wrongs here because each case has its different merits and each situation is different - but it is important to take a step back and think carefully about what you are going to do. Older horses do not often cope well with complete rest - but if you believe they need it although you don't want them out, remember how valuable good grooming (strapping) is for the muscle tone - something that is harder to rebuild the

older "we all" get! Keeping joints warm is essential if standing in for long periods of time and once the weight starts to go - it's hard to get back in the colder months!

Probably the most popular choice is some variation of the "ticking over" choice - we all like the hack out - there's always the Riding Club "Xmas ! outings and keeps the joints and muscles going for both horse and rider! "Change of scene" can be as "intense" or "ticking over" as you please and really beneficial to youngsters as well as developing (or remembering) our jockey skills.

Whichever road you decide to take - how you bring them back to work is where you need to plan and plan well - looking at what you want to achieve next season and when -then build your fitness programme around it - and a fitness plan will be needed whichever option you have taken.