

WORDS: RIC CHAPMAN

YOUNG HORSES MAY REQUIRE A CALMING AGENT

Two-year-olds often take a little time to adapt once they enter racing stables

In captivity, sometimes a thoroughbred is frequently confined and without anything to chew on. It understandable then, when it becomes uninterested, annoyed and in need of something to do.

Now, consider this before you berate a young horse who has come from two years of roaming in a paddock, free of the strain a stable brings, and freer still of some of the noise associated with stable life.

So when you consider the changes in habits that we ask of the horse, it is amazing that the two-year-old adapts at all.

When pushed too far it will find ways to satisfy its physical and psychological needs and, like humans, what is 'too far' varies widely from individual to individual.

When we see this curiosity in play, we deem it bad behaviour most times. And left unchecked it will become just that. So racehorse handlers need to use a calming agent.

A legitimate calming agent that can be administered appropriately during the

week can be of great benefit to the stressed out, hyper horse now playing up.

But, and this is essential to know – EVERY calming agent on the market MUST be stopped being given at least 24 hours before racing – and best 48 hours just to be sure.

One such calming agent, BetaCALM, the widely used and highly regarded powder from the stable of Kelato Animal Health, is pretty much picture perfect to use on younger horses in particular.

It can either be sprinkled over the feed or mixed with a tasty apple source and given orally over the back of the tongue. When ingested effectively, BetaCALM can be seen working within 90mins.

With repetition, and when combined with simultaneous, effective restraining, this regime will alter your horse's unruly behaviours.

When left, uncalmed if you like, repetitions of the errant behaviour will be adapted to the horse's thinking

and will disrupt the now abnormal environment. And once it has become ingrained, more often than not, these behaviours are impossible to eradicate ... if allowed to go unchecked or punished only by a swift crack across the head.

There is evidence to suggest that some of these behaviours are based on the release of some of the pleasure chemicals in the horse's brain called endorphins and enkephalins.

Trainers often refer to these bad habits and annoying vices with a variety of names (expletive deleted) but followed by biting or wind sucking, weaving, pacing, poring, kicking the stall, etc!

"It is better used during the week at training anyway," claimed Colin Blackhall, Managing Director of Kelato Animal Health. "None of our products are designed to be consumed or administered on race day and BetaCALM works better when it becomes accepted by a horse during the training phase."

But while BetaCALM is available to help calm the wild young beast, trainers are



reminded that external causes may be at foot, which bear looking at also.

And some of these will not be improved by consuming any calming agent. For example:-

- Horse was previously fine but develops behaviour issues under saddle. This could be a sign that the horse is hurting somewhere. Before doing anything else, make a list of things that may trigger the behaviour, such as being asked to jump from the gates, accelerate from cantering to galloping, working inside other horses. These can be important clues to whether the horse might be hurting. A horse like this may also simply be "sour," or bored with its routine.

- Horse was recently purchased and was fine with the old owner but isn't now. Hopefully you had your vet draw blood to hold for drug testing as part of your pre-purchase exam. Both short- and long-term tranquilizers (30 days or longer from a single treatment) can be used to make horses behave well for prospective buyers. If you're sure that's not the problem, the horse may be testing you to see what it

can get away with or it may simply be having trouble adjusting to its new environment and routine. Things like the loss of old buddies and changes in the level of turnout can lead to behaviour issues. Different causes call for a different management and training approaches, and often calming agents like BetaCALM.

- Isolated resistances and phobias. This would include things like resistance to being bridled/haltered, or an inordinate fear of something mundane such as clippers. Depending on the problem, the first step is to rule out a physical cause (like sore ears). But once you rule out physical causes, BetaCALM may help to calm the horse while you retain it. Once a horse becomes calmer and accepts its new surrounds, you can discontinue BetaCALM.

INGREDIENTS THAT HELP CALM
The way BetaCALM has been constructed is to make your horse a calmer, less stressed individual. To make this happen a supplement MUST have a carefully balanced level of tryptophan, magnesium, vitamin E and thiamine.

Tryptophan's role as an amino acid is to stabilize the horse's mood. Without a suitable dose of tryptophan in your horse's system, mental confusion and anxiety may follow.

Because tryptophan cannot be manufactured by a horse, it must come from other sources. BetaCALM has the right amount. Magnesium has been scientifically proven to calm nerves.

Vitamin E has for a long time been considered a wonderful de-stresser for both man and beast. Thiamine (B1) plays an integral role in settling nerves within a horse, and these are, obviously, heightened in a young horse experiencing things for the first time.

Keep in mind that common training diets do not contain enough essential amino acids. They need propping up with supplements.