



Preserving the Mental and Emotional Health of Your Equine Friends

By Heidi J. Potter

Research has shown that the stress level of a therapy horse can exceed that of a performance horse or a race horse. One way to help a therapy horse deal with the stress of his occupation is to offer him a variety of interactions with people and riders. Here are a few ideas:

Have a skilled rider exercise the horse once or twice a week. Give the horse a good workout using clear communication and asking for a variety of movements or activities. This could include dressage work, jumping, reining patterns, etc. In addition to the physical, mental and emotional benefit, this work will help keep him more responsive and in good working order.

Offer the horse a chance to ride out of the ring. Take him for a relaxing hack in the country to brighten his mood, stimulate him mentally, and offer him some uneven terrain to navigate. Include a nice canter or gallop, if safe to do so, which will allow his body to stretch and his spirits to soar.

For an older or more physically challenged therapy horse you can get him out of the ring to just hand walk or hand graze for a while. Add in a nice grooming and then allow him to return to the herd. What a nice, stress-free experience for a deserving friend