

## Manure Mania

By Cindy Hale

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Let's talk poop. I once read a statement from a veterinary resource that said the average horse produces about 50 pounds of manure a day. My response was, "Really? Is that all? Because I swear it seems like a heck of a lot more when I'm cleaning the corrals."

As horse lovers we're surrounded by manure. Non-horsey folk wrinkle their noses and recoil in revulsion when any of us off-handedly refer to our mucking skills as everyday chores, sort of like washing dishes.

Personally, I've become so lackadaisical about manure that I don't even bother to change out of my muck shoes if I'm running to the post office or the bank. I figure I live in a horsekeeping community. Those outsiders who don't know one end of a horse from the pooping end of a horse can just learn to deal with the faint aroma of ammonia and methane that's wafting up from the rubber soles of my shoes.

Yet there are other days when this less than glamorous side of horse ownership gets to me. Sometimes when I'm dragging around grubby stall mats or excavating a cavern of urine-soaked shavings, I'll think to myself, "I have six years of college and look at me. I wonder my former pals in that Master's Thesis class would think of me now."

To really humble me, I have a horse with a keen sense of propriety when it comes to manure. Every single day Joey deposits at least one pile of poo on top of the short block wall that encompasses his paddock. It really is an amazing feat. The low row of blocks is beneath panels of wrought iron that complete the fence line. Joey has to back up and aim to get that pyramid of poop to balance on that narrow expanse of bricks. And yet he does it. Every day. Of course, he also leaves all of his manure along the perimeter of his pen, as if he's trying desperately to keep all the manure out of his house, but he just can't quite make it go over the fence. I swear, if he had access to a port-o-potty, he'd use it.

There's even more puzzlement to be found in poop. Manure disposal is a constant source of discussion in our horsekeeping community. Currently there's a debate over whether it's cost effective to fund construction of a plant that would convert all the manure collected each week into energy. It's the ultimate concept in recycling. It goes like this: I buy the hay. My horses consume it and transform it into manure. I expend energy shoveling the reconstituted hay into bins, which are then picked up by the waste management company and delivered to the conversion plant. And then, Presto! I magically get to pay for the energy produced by the hay I purchased in the first place.

And speaking of manure disposal, I can't help but be bemused every time I look at the containers our city uses to collect the stuff. Horse owners rent extra large carts or metal bins, and then enormous trucks ramble up and down the streets and confiscate their contents. Glued to the side of each container is a sticker that implores us to make sure we aren't putting dirty poop inside. How am I supposed to differentiate? And even if I could, what am I supposed to do with the dirty manure versus the "clean" manure? Even I, with my decades of excrement experience, cannot figure that one out. Maybe I need to go back to college.

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