

Measuring Fitness Progress

By Sarah Christie

Horse Illustrated July 2006

The average resting heart rate of a healthy, mature horse is between 30 - 40 beats per minute (bpm). When your horse starts sweating and blowing, you know he is working hard. But respiration isn't the most reliable means of determining how hard. A horse's pulse rate is the best indicator of his stress levels and the only way to track his aerobic progress.

Using a stethoscope, or the tips of your fingers, locate your horse's pulse just in front of the girth, underneath his left elbow. You will hear or feel a rhythmic lub-dub, lub-dub sound. Starting at zero, count the number of beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by 4. Taken at home, before any exercise, this is your horse's resting heart rate.

If you want to know how hard your horse is working, or track his improving aerobic fitness, take his pulse at the top of a hill. Wait three minutes, and take it again. If his heart rate has returned to normal or very near normal, he is ready to continue. Over time you should notice a less elevated rate for the same degree of work. This tells you that you are making progress.

Back to King of the Hill.