

Primo's Potassium Story

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Back in early spring (09) I received a call from a very worried Denise. She had leased out 'Primo' in May to some competent, competitive people who wanted to do some showing and dressage.

All went well until late August when Primo, completely out of the blue, after 5-10 minutes of going perfectly, would rear! Not something he had ever done before. At first it was a nappy sort of a rear but after a few days it was 'right up'!!

Naturally this was causing great concern and it posed a mystery to everybody. WHY??

I asked Denise if he was showing any other signs like being touchy or grouchy but at this stage, no, he would go along quite happily and then all of a sudden throw in a rearing tantrum! Then he would get over it and go along happily again.

This sort of behaviour arising early spring 'smacked' of being some kind of grass issue. It was therefore logical to yard him on adlib hay with a twice daily feed of beet containing a heaped tablespoon of salt and highly absorbable organic magnesium with boron.

Well, at first it was like he got worse, became very aggressive and dangerous to be around in the yard. So the vet was called and bloods were taken. As I had mentioned he was probably high in potassium they asked for a potassium reading to be included in the blood test.

His potassium came back at 8.6 (It should be 3-5). This is an extremely high, life threatening reading! The highest the attending vet had ever seen!

How had it got so high? Easily! The horse had been grazing lush spring pasture plus 'rich' clover hay plus lucerne. He was therefore eating about 10kgs /day of high potassium forage, literally flooding his system. (Hundreds of grams of potassium when his daily requirement is around 25).

Out of the same 10kgs of forage he was only getting about 2 grams of sodium! All the literature says that excess potassium in the diet is not a problem so long as the kidneys are functioning normally as it is normally excreted in the urine. But not in the absence of sufficient sodium. As soon as salt (sodium chloride) is added to the diet the horse drinks more and then excretes more potassium.

The reason 'getting them off the grass' works is because it is the quickest way to drop the potassium content of their diet. Actually it is necessary to temporarily removing all green from the diet ie no lucerne either. This gets potassium DOWN and add sodium chloride (salt), highly absorbable organic Magnesium with Boron plus extra organic calcium. to get these other minerals UP.



Within a week on this regime 'Primo' was much improved. Another blood test showed his potassium levels were back to normal. But at first it didn't take much to send him over the edge again. At one point he was fed some comfrey leaves which caused an immediate relapse. Comfrey and many herbs are also very high in potassium.

The good news is that he was back to normal for the Ashburton A&P Show in November, where he won the County Open Hack, won the Open Best Mannered and was 2nd Best Paced Hack.

He was extremely well behaved, not batting an eye at all the goings on, including helicopters, Clydesdales, etc and it was quite an achievement to win the Manners Class in Open company on the Saturday. I know Amanda and Craig Wiggins did a lot of ground and ridden work to get him there in addition to the strict diet he was on.

Primo's story is a classic example of how a serious behaviour problem can be caused by feeding a diet that seemed the 'best' for the horse but which was in fact the opposite.

A big thank-you to Amanda and her Mum for allowing us to share Primo's story in the hope it will save others the exasperation, expense, lost time and risk of a serious accident.

Primo is back to being a great Show Hack!



Primo in winning form at the Ashburton A& P Show Nov 09