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## **What about the other 23 hours of a day?**

### **Why the quality of the horse's day outside of riding matters**

While great emphasis is put on what happens during training and riding the horse, of equal importance, according to Professor Jan Ladewig of Copenhagen University, Denmark, is the quality of 'the other 23 hours a day'. Ladewig stated that "If we expect horses to perform at a high level, either during competitions, or during general leisure riding...and if we expect them to be safe and easy going to handle and to ride, we must consider the quality of all those hours of the day and night when they are left by themselves, when we are not around". Ladewig's presentation focussed on current husbandry methods, the problems associated with them and suggested how changes could be implemented for the betterment of the horse's welfare.

Current equine management practices may arise from erroneous information people have about horses, the horses social structure, and particularly the horse's needs. Citing a Swiss study that found 83.5% of horses from 12 different riding schools were housed individually, Ladewig reported that some horse owners do not allow their horse to have group turnout, believing that injury is more likely in such settings. This belief is incongruent with the results of a study showing that horses in group turnout on pasture suffered no more injuries than horses housed individually in stalls.

Presenting a photo of a single horse, rugged and stabled, with the caption 'Housing horses in this way is not right!' Ladewig noted that "Domestication has not removed the basic social, physiological and psychological needs of the horse, and some management and living conditions fail to meet these needs for horses. If we are really concerned about the welfare of riding horses we must get away from individual housing and change over to group housing".

Some horse owners may also think that turnout is unnecessary, believing that horses get all the exercise they need from being ridden. A 30-year-old research paper stated that the riding school horses studied received on average 41 minutes of exercise, six days per week; this contrasts with the results of a more recent (2010) study showing feral horses travelled an average of 17.9 km per day. Ladewig suggested that the difference in distances travelled by the horses in those two studies could explain why many modern horses suffer from health issues such as obesity.

Studies have shown that the domesticated horse does not differ substantially from the wild horse, such as Przewalski's horse - either physically or psychologically. Referring to a slide showing a band of Przewalski's horses out on the open pusta, Ladewig commented "Obviously, if we compare this scene with the horse standing in his box that I showed earlier, and we know that the horses in these two scenes are pretty much alike, I think we get a strong indication of how wrong our predominant housing system is". Horses need physical contact with other horses, and social isolation prohibits the horse from engaging in mutual grooming, play, and simply just being near other horses they are bonded with. "Most domestic animals are social animals. That is almost a requirement for being domesticated" states Ladewig.

Ladewig also discussed ways horse owners and managers can meet the species-specific needs of the horse in a modern world, including: group housing alternatives, paddock and pasture enrichments (e.g. dirt to roll in, trees and branches to forage on) and early socialization in mixed sex/age herds.

“I hope I’ve made it pretty clear that what we need is much more information on how horses are housed, how much they get out either alone, and with other horses and how much they are ridden” Ladewig stated, as he implored those attending the ISES conference to send research students out to acquire much needed data in this area.

**- ENDS -**

The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to facilitate research into the training of horses to enhance horse welfare and improve the horse-rider relationship. [www.equitationscience.com](http://www.equitationscience.com)

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