

## **Winter bonding in the barn**

by Denise Penney

Winter can be just as depressing and boring for our horses as it can be for us.

Horses notice the time change and reduced day light hours. In the summer, they are used to daily trail rides. We can't go trail riding in the winter - the sides of the roads are too icy and soft. Some people can sleigh ride on their property which is great fun.

We leave the horses out in the evening as long as the weather isn't bad and cold. They entertain themselves easier outdoors than in the barn where they can get bored. That's when they chew their stalls, pick at, and torment each other over the stall walls, kick the walls and sometimes squeal. Anything to pass the time.

This year, Nova Scotia's winter has been uncharacteristically mild and wet. Great for keeping the horses out and the barn clean.

Other years, our horses have been in the barn three weeks in a row because the paddock was so icy or the weather cold and stormy. When we finally let them out they roll around and run and kick up their heels to wear off their stored energy.

Unless you have a dry ring with good footing or an indoor arena, spending time with them in the winter is difficult. It's not fun being in the barn when its -20 degrees out and you'd rather be inside drinking hot chocolate. Usually the barn is only -4 degrees, but that's still uncomfortable for me. Standing close to the horses keeps us warm on those cold nights.

With a little effort, we can stay bonded to our horses in the winter. We can groom them, hang out with them or teach them little activities such as bowing for a treat. We can massage their sore muscles and get them to do stretching exercises. Older horses stuck in the barn for days need to stretch and get those arthritic joints moving. Time well spent.

*See you on the trail. Ride safely! Denise Penney*

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