

## To blanket or not to blanket?

by Denise Penney

With winter slowly approaching, horse owners are looking for the blankets they stored away for the summer or shopping for new ones to replace the mangled ones they threw out in the spring.

Some people believe horses need to be blanketed, but others disagree. It depends on what you do with your horse and in what type of environment they are kept. It also depends on the horse's physical condition.

I do not blanket my horses. My old gelding gets a nice winter coat and I never see him shivering. I don't have a run-in (or lean to) for shelter because I put them in the barn whenever they need protection from the elements. I'm happy my horses don't have to endure bad weather.

They can stay warm outdoors - unless they are in the wind and rain. Some horse owners' work obligations interfere with bringing their animals into the barn or letting them go outdoors with a sudden change in the weather.

Horses can be blanketed because of their age, arthritis or other health concerns. There are stables that offer clinics and competitions during the cold weather - having a clean horse without a thick winter coat is preferable. There is plenty to keep in mind when considering whether or not to blanket your horse:

- What is the barn temperature?
- Will they be cold once the blanket comes off?
- Will the blanket left on?
- Will the horses be worked?
- How sweaty are they after they've been worked?

“A horse is like a best friend.  
They're always there to nuzzle you  
and make life a better place.”

- Unknown

Ever go for a sleigh ride and see how sweaty and wet the horses get? Most horse owners blanket them after they have worked so they don't get sick. Remember to cool them off by walking them slowly. Then remove the blanket when the horses are cooled and put them back out to pasture. Don't put them out in the cold and wind until their temperature is normal.

There are all sorts of blankets - each serves a different purpose:

- An insulated winter turnout,
- A rain turnout so they don't get wet and chilled,
- Stable blanket,
- Summer Sheets,
- Exercise Rugs,
- Fly sheets.

Whether you blanket your horses or not, the goal is to keep them healthy, happy and comfortable – all year long.

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