Managing a Working Horse in the Stable

Henry E. Fawcus, 1911

Selected pages from The Horse: Its Care and Management.

A period stable-management chapter on bedding, grooming and the everyday care of working horses.

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CHAPTER V.

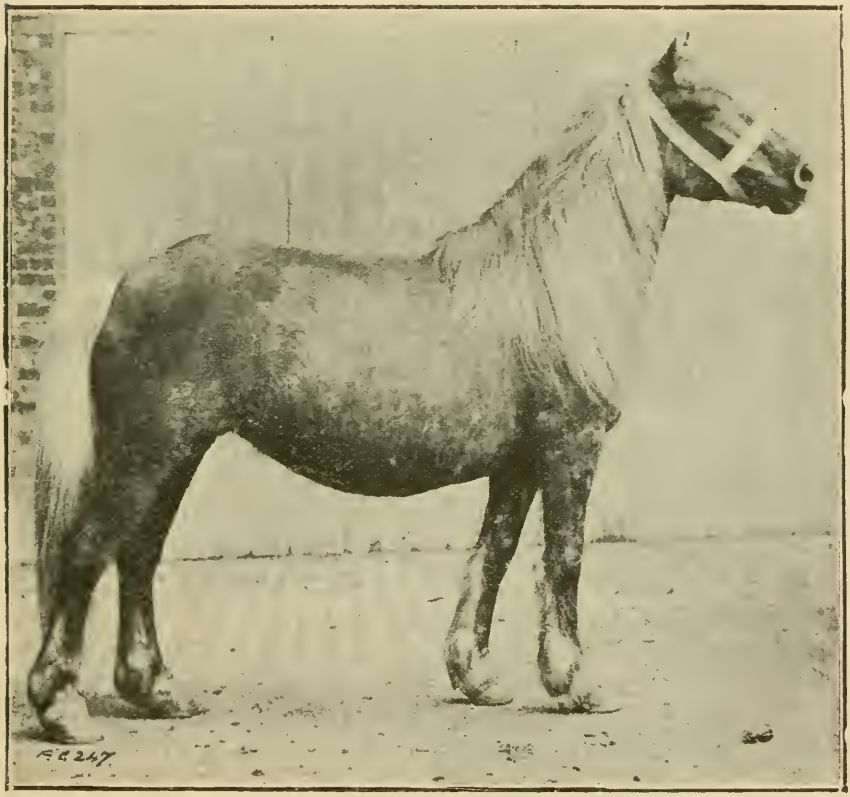
MANAGEMENT IN THE STABLE.

Bedding.—The provision of bedding for horses in the stable is necessary in order that they may rest comfortably at nights. A good and soft bed ensures a thorough and complete rest. The bedding further serves to absorb the urine, and in the winter it helps to keep the horses warm.

Straw forms the best kind of bedding, and is most generally used. Wheat straw is much superior to either oat or barley straw for littering purposes, on account of its possessing greater absorbing powers, and making a better bed. When bedding horses down with straw, it should be well shaken out either by hand or with a fork, and distributed evenly over the floor of the stall or box. It is a good plan to bank up the straw to a distance of about a foot against the stall partitions or the walls of the box. By doing this, possible injuries to the legs of horses are prevented, as they often knock their legs against the partitions or wall while lying down or in getting up.

Peat-moss Litter is very suitable for bedding purposes; it possesses much greater absorbing powers for liquid than straw, but it does not make so comfortable nor so soft a bed as the latter. If litter has to be purchased, it will often be found more economical to buy peat-moss than straw, but not in all cases. When using peat-moss litter, all lumps must be completely broken up, and thoroughly disintegrated before it is put down.

Sawdust makes a useful bedding material, and if there is a saw-mill in the neighbourhood, it will pay to make use of sawdust instead of using straw; the latter can then be sold if the farm or holding is near a town. Wood-shavings can also be used as litter; the great drawback to these, however, is that they require to be burnt before they can be utilised as manure.



PRIZE HIGHLAND PONY MARE, "FANNY."
Winner of First Prize for Mountain or Moorland Ponies at the Polo Pony Show, 1912.
Owner, Sir George Bullough.
(Photo by A. J. Bowden.)

Grooming.—All stabled horses require a certain amount of grooming if they are to be kept in health. Grooming not

only cleans the coat, and keeps it free from dirt and possible parasites, but it also keeps the pores of the skin open, and thus helps to maintain the general health of the horses in good order. One grooming a day will meet all requirements, and this may either be carried out in the evening, after the horses come in from work, or in the morning, according to which time is the most convenient. The details of grooming are as follows: The currycomb should be applied to those parts of the coat where the hair is caked or matted with dried sweat or dirt. After that, the body and legs should be well brushed with a dandy-brush, care being taken to get right down to the roots of the hairs with the brush; a superficial brushing is of no use. Finally, the coat should be brushed down with a body-brush, which will remove the scurf left after the dandy-brush has been used. After every two or three strokes with the body-brush, it should be drawn over the currycomb which is held in the other hand; this is done in order to clean the brush. The scurf in the currycomb is removed by tapping it against the floor. The mane and tail must be kept thoroughly clean, as these parts are chiefly exposed to the attacks of lice and other parasites, if neglected. The mane requires both combing and brushing every day, the dandy-brush being applied to the roots of the mane-hairs. The tail should daily be combed. Especial care must be taken to keep the "feathering" on the legs of cart and Shire horses clean. If there is a pond on the farmsteading, the horses should be made to walk through it every day, after their return from work, as this will help to clean the legs. Failing a convenient pond, the legs may be cleaned, after work, by pouring water over them with a bucket. In the winter, however, all washing and unnecessary wetting of the legs must be avoided. During this season, the legs should be cleansed by brushing them, after the mud and dirt on them has dried. When horses come in from work in a hot and perspiring state, a good rub down with wisps of straw will do them good, and add to their comfort, though it is not absolutely essential. In the spring, when the horses are shedding their winter coat, the removal of the latter should in

nowise be hastened by increased grooming, but, on the contrary, less grooming should be given, so as to avoid forcing out the hairs before they fall out of their own accord. The premature removal of the winter coat by artificial means spoils the look of the summer coat, and also increases the risk of the horses catching cold, which is always pretty great while the coat is being shed.

Clipping.—Team-horses, doing farm work, are usually not clipped in winter. Having to stand about in the open a great deal, and being exposed to all kinds of weather, they require the thick winter coat, with which nature provides them, as a protection. As their work is performed at a walking pace, a heavy coat does not interfere with their working powers. The case is, however, quite different where horses and ponies are concerned, which have to work at a faster pace than a walk. In their case, the removal of the winter coat by clipping is very advisable, as this both increases their working capacity, and tends to keep them in health. Unclipped horses sweat profusely when worked at a fast pace, and once the coat has become saturated with sweat, it takes a long time to dry. The profuse sweating has a weakening effect, and also renders the horses very liable to catch cold. The practice of clipping horses in no way increases the risk of their catching a chill, if they are covered with a rug while in the stable. A horse should be clipped from the first week in October to the beginning of November, and a second clipping will be required about the new year. Many animals will require to be clipped three times during the winter, but in no case should a horse be clipped later than the end of January, otherwise the spring coats will be spoilt The legs are best left unclipped: to clip them exposes them needlessly to cracked heels and mud fever, while it also involves a great deal of unnecessary trouble.

Clothing.—Farm-horses do not require a rug at any season and none should be used. Horses that have been

clipped must be provided with a rug. In very cold weather, and if the stable is a cold one, two rugs may be necessary. Wool-lined jute rugs are the best kind to use; they are cheap, and last a long time. When two rugs are used, the under rug should be an ordinary fawn woollen one.

Head-stalls.—Strong leather head-stalls are the most useful; they will stand wear for many years, and in the long run, prove much more economical than hemp or web halters. The horse should be tied up with a rope or chain running through a ring, a block of wood being fastened to the end of the rope or chain.

Cleaning the Stable.—The stable must be mucked out every morning, all dung and wet litter being removed. The dry bedding, if it consists of straw, should be put in the front part of the stall, so as to leave the floor in the back part uncovered, thus allowing the latter to dry and air. The fresh straw required each day is put down in the evenings, the horses being "bedded-down" last thing at nights. When peat-moss-litter or sawdust is employed, the droppings must be removed each morning, together with the wet patches, which have soaked up the urine. A shovel is employed to remove the latter, and the holes made in the bedding must be filled up with dry material. Treated in this way, a bed made up of peat-moss or sawdust will last a month. At the end of this time, the entire bedding requires to be removed, and the floor must be washed down, and then allowed to dry and air for several hours before fresh bedding is put down.

A Word about Flies.—During the summer, efforts should be made to keep the stable as free from flies as possible. In order to keep flies away, the stable should be kept darkened during the hot hours of the day, and wire-gauze may be placed over the window-openings. By creating a draught in the stable, the flies will be induced to leave it. Dirt attracts flies, and scrupulous cleanliness in the stable, and the removal of all droppings, largely helps to keep flies away.