

# OFF THE HOOF



Why am I here (when half me's asleep and the other's still in bed) making the coffee with teabags?

*Michael Alkins*

As I begin to write 'Off the Hoof' I can hear the rain beating strongly against the window. The past few days have been bitterly cold and already some of my fields are under water. The clocks went back last week and so there is less daylight in the evenings and there seems to be so much more to do.

As the 'credit crunch' takes hold, the knock-on effect is starting to bite. Already feed and bedding costs have risen. I know I am not alone in trying to keep my horses out for as long as possible, although mine do have the advantage of being able to free range. They have a small feed with additives and carrots each day and hay is available. It is essential to have rugs which fit correctly and are both warm and waterproof and are checked daily to prevent rubbing and discomfort.

Bedding will possibly be in short supply owing to the bad weather when straw was cut. Cut-backs in the building industry means sawmills will not be producing as much woodchips. An alternative is now on offer in the form of 'recycled' wood chip-pings in pellet form. These are reported to work out cheaper to buy and less is used as the absorbency rate is higher so less is removed.

I have noticed the prices for horses and ponies have fallen dramatically in the last couple of months and this will possibly raise the issue once again of live horses being exported for meat. This (as most animal lovers do) I find disgusting.

World Horse Welfare (formerly

known as ILPH (International League for the Protection of Horses) is always looking for support, so if you really care, call **01953 497262** for more details of either how to join or what you can do to help.

Last month I was asked to Steward at the British Miniature Horse Championships at Arena UK. Not having any dealings with these little equines I thought it might be a learning experience. Jill Latchford was the judge I was stewarding for and the procedure is pretty much the same as all showing classes. One of the other judges was from America and they certainly do things differently over there. To say it was an experience is putting it mildly. The people are really passionate about their charges and I have never seen so many adults in the Fancy Dress Class. They even had a best dressed Evening class with ladies in sparkly long dresses and glitter on the ponies. There was a ridden class and also a driving class which looked really good. Another unusual class was a freestyle where the pony was let loose in the ring and was controlled by two persons. I guess this was a Parelli class but would have benefited with a round ring. I cannot say I was impressed with it although I appreciate the owners must put in a lot of hard work in to keep the little horses as fit as they do. I even have difficulty calling an equine that is only inches high - a horse.

It was a very long day, starting for me getting up 4.30 a.m. and crawling back to bed at 4.15 a.m. the following day. The last class was at 1.30 a.m. as everything was running late, and guess what? It was a two day event and so they had to do it all again the next day! I do not think I will be showing Miniatures as endearing as they may look.

*Joanne Burns* did not do as well as hoped in the Summer Championships, but a few days prior to them she was involved in a bad car accident and was not fully fit, in fact she is lucky to have survived.

While she is extremely busy breaking and schooling as well as jumping, she has managed to take time out to train

for U.K.C.C. qualification (United Kingdom Credited Coach) for the BSJA (British Show Jumping Association). It is quite an intensive course which covers aspects of teaching methods and the physical and psychological aspects of both horse and rider along with diet and fitness of both. At present she is aiming for level 2 and, following an assessment will progress to level 3. Once successful, she will be the only Accredited BSJA Instructor for this area which is area 24. Joanne is truly a knowledgeable, dedicated horsewoman with the enthusiasm to learn and share her knowledge.

Christmas is not far away now and it is always a time of mixed emotions and, no doubt, many of us will be watching the pennies more than usual.

*Pelham Tack* in Immingham offer a very extensive range of clothing, saddlery and gifts, from high visibility wear, cufflinks, jewellery, hunting flasks and an amazing range of rugs and offers galore, including everything your horse will need to fight off mud fever and buy a wash and get a gel free! This Aladdin's Cave has been nominated for the Small Business of the Year Award which is amazing as it has only been running for a year. Certainly gets my vote and is really worth a visit.

*Naturally Beautiful* offer Gift Vouchers which are an ideal present as there are lots of treatments on offer which can be taken after Christmas. See the advert in this edition.

*Dr. Robert Jaggs-Fowler* has a book of poems published which is available in both paper and hardback, a truly enjoyable book. Again, see his advert in this edition.

*Dan Burton* is still running his company called *Socks On*, which

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