

Gypsy horse

Health

**Expert Advice on Keeping
Your Gypsy Horse
in Picture
Perfect Health**

By Celeste Karpf

We've consulted a variety of professionals to determine the best way to care for your Gypsy horse. The Gypsy horse is known for its gentle temperament, exceptional stamina and sturdy conformation. Although they are known for being easy keepers, it is important that your horse be given the same care expected of any other horse. As responsible owners, your horse relies on you to keep them operating at their full potential. We've put together a simple guide with some useful advice to help keep your horse in tip-top shape!

FARRIER Q & A – MIKE STINE

EJ: What is the general soundness of a Gypsy horse's hooves?

MS: In general, the Gypsy horse's hooves follow the characteristics of their draft horse origins – they should have high quality, large round feet that are strong and hard. The frogs should be well developed and the hoof should have wide heels.

EJ: Do horses with feather tend to have any issues with their hooves that are related to the feathering?

MS: In my opinion, hoof issues are more likely to be related to the environmental conditions in which the horse is kept or hoof maintenance issues rather than the fact that the horse has feathering. However, with the feathers on a Gypsy horse covering the entire hoof, an issue may not be noticed until it has progressed into a problem with the hooves. A more common problem

Guide



Photo: Gerold Wheeler, Gypsy-MVP

that can surface is pastern dermatitis or scratches, which is a skin problem rather than a hoof issue.

EJ: What should a Gypsy horse owner know about their horse's hooves?

MS: A Gypsy horse owner will want to inspect their horse's hooves regularly and have a regular schedule of professional hoof care. Since the feathers can get in the way of seeing the hoof and in the way of the farrier, one trick is to use a large pair of knee high panty hose with the toe end opened up and pulled over the hoof so it holds the feathers inside the hose up above the hoof. Leg wraps can also be used to hold feathers out of the way.

In general, all horse owners should watch their horse's hooves for signs of thrush, flares or distortions in the hoof wall,

and uneven wear patterns on the hoof. Regular hoof trimming helps prevent these issues from occurring.

EJ: What advice can you give someone who is trimming a heavier horse's hoof?

MS: First, require that the horse have good ground manners for trimming and/or shoeing. A heavier horse can injure a person without much effort at all, just due to their size, so safety of the trimmer should be a priority. Other than that, the guidelines I use for trimming are the same no matter the size of the hoof. Trimming by using landmarks on the hoof to achieve a balanced hoof is the goal.

One tip: if you are shoeing a horse with feathers and hot fitting, BE SURE the feathers are out of the way to avoid catching them on fire. Also, some show horses may have a flammable

Photo: Equine Dynamics



Journeyman Farrier Mike Stine, Certified Natural Balance Farrier & Trimmer.

substance such as hair spray or show sheen on the feathers that could ignite if it comes in contact with a hot shoe!

EJ: What type of shoes should Gypsy horse owners put on their horse's hooves? Why?

MS: Since Gypsy horses and draft-type horses in general have thicker walls, the shoes should be a wide-webbed shoe, or be at least twice the thickness of the hoof wall. The reason for this is to provide more support, more expansion room and cor-

rect nail placement. Other than that, it would depend more on the use or discipline the horse is being used for. Most importantly, the shoes should be of ample size in order to avoid contracting the heels and in order to provide enough support.

EJ: Are shoes less necessary for a Gypsy horse?

MS: My understanding is that many Gypsy horses are able to perform just fine barefoot if they have the breed standard of a large round hoof that is strong and hard. There again, the environment they are kept in and the work they are asked to perform will be factors in determining whether to shoe an individual Gypsy horse or not.

EJ: In what case should a Gypsy horse have or not have shoes?

MS: The owner should evaluate the hoof condition and quality as described previously, and if the horse is having problems staying sound while barefoot, shoeing could be beneficial. If the horse is having other hoof problems like cracks, flares, distortions or thrush, they may be corrected by more regular, balanced hoof trimming and keeping the hooves drier. Your professional farrier and veterinarian can help an owner make the decision on whether shoes are necessary based on the situation with that Gypsy horse.

Mike Stine, the owner of Equine Dynamics, is a Registered Journeyman Farrier (RJF) and Certified Natural Balance Farrier & Trimmer (CNBF, CNBT). Mike is a professional farrier and educator who specializes in equine biomechanics and whole horse

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evaluation. In 2010, he was Official Farrier for the FEI qualifier at The Fork Horse Trials in NC and in 2008 served as evaluating farrier for the USEF Endurance Team East Coast training session. In addition to his full time farrier services, Mike often conducts educational programs in the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit www.equinedynamics.com or email mike@equinedynamics.com.

VETERINARIAN Q & A DR. CARA MCNAMEE, DVM, NEW ENGLAND EQUINE MEDICAL & SURGICAL CENTER

EJ: Are there any diseases or conditions that the Gypsy horse is known for?

CM: Gypsy horses may be predisposed to some similar diseases as draft breeds. A few diseases that may affect Gypsy horses as well are shivers, PSSM, and chronic progressive lymphedema. Shivers is commonly confused with stringhalt, and horses that are affected will lift their hind limbs and tail in the air and shiver for up to a few minutes before being able to put them down. The cause at this time is unknown, and the only treatment that has been shown to help is consistent exercise.

PSSM, or Polysaccharide Storage Myopathy, is a genetic disease that affects many draft and warmblood breeds, as well as another type that affects mostly Quarter Horses. In drafts, it is characterized by a reluctance to move, hind end weakness and muscle atrophy as well as soreness. It is diagnosed by genetic testing of blood or muscle biopsy. Treatment is aimed at dietary management, by eliminating sweet feed and other carbohydrate rich foods.

Chronic Progressive Lymphedema (CPL), is a disease that has actually been seen in Gypsy horses, and clinical signs usually start early in life. Signs usually start looking like "scratches," and then progress to significant swelling and secondary infections that result in nodule formation and permanent disfigurement of the lower legs. Treatment involves clipping of the feathers with regular cleaning and treatment of secondary infections, therefore regular palpation and cleaning of the lower limbs and feathers is important in detecting this disease.



Dr. Cara McNamee, DVM

EJ: Does the Gypsy horse tend to be an easy keeper?

CM: Because Gypsy horses are a "heavier" breed, they can put on weight easily if not in a regular exercise program. Obesity in horses can predispose them to problems such as Insulin Resistance or Equine Metabolic Syndrome, which can lead to laminitis. Gypsy horses should be maintained at a body condition score of 4 to 6 out of 9 (<http://www.thehorse.com/pdf/nutrition/bcs-poster.pdf>), and ideally should be in a regular exercise program.

EJ: What are some tips to keep Gypsy horses in particular, healthy?

CM: Gypsy horses are like any other horse. A balanced diet, exercise or turnout, parasite prevention, hoof care, and yearly dental exams and vaccinations are the most important things to keep in mind.

EJ: Is there anything that might be of concern during this time of year?

CM: Make sure your horses are up to date on vaccines, particularly for West Nile Virus as mosquitoes can persist until the first frost. In anticipation of winter, check blankets for damage, and decide whether you want your horses to go barefoot or with snowshoes for the winter. You may also consider trimming their feathers so that they don't collect icicles in the snow.

GROOM Q & A – WITH RUTHANN SMITH

EJ: Why is it important to groom a Gypsy horse often?

RS: It is important to groom any horse often. You need to inspect for cuts and swelling. Grooming also increases circulation, improves muscle tone and exfoliates, allowing naturally protective oils to be stimulated and released. Finding cuts, heat or swelling early on can help eliminate ghastly veterinarian bills or even loss of use. The importance of stimulating oils is not to be underestimated. They make the skin more resilient, strengthen hair and even keep it cleaner. Most conventional shampoos, shine agents and detanglers, as well as the sun and dirt, dry out the coat. A dry coat, especially when the hair is coarse like on



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a Gypsy horse, is very porous. Thirsty hair grabs onto dirt, and stains penetrate. Naturally healthy, nourished hair is smoother, shines deeply and stays cleaner longer.

Currying a lot is the best thing you can do for your horse. Use it as a way to improve health as well as listen to your horse. Note if there are sore, hot or swollen areas. Address them before they are a problem. A cleaned cut, day off or cold hose can do wonders. Always note changes, especially on legs.

To Curry: Circle in the direction of hair growth and put your back into it. Get a good rhythm going. If your horse is not used to being curried, start in slowly. You don't want to make him sore. Careful: Horses tend to be ticklish on the flank as well when reaching to curry inside the hind legs.

EJ: What are some results of improper grooming?

RS: Stains, scratches and crud are just some of the pervasive conditions considered normal, but that can actually be averted. While traditions can pass on wisdom, they are also often based on what people had available in the past. Now we realize many treatments actually perpetuate problems we took for granted. A little knowledge and a shift in your program can go a long way to: save time, make less work, improve your horse's coat and lower costs.

EJ: What are some common issues that the Gypsy horse has due to its heavy mane, tail and feather?

RS: Caution: It troubles me greatly that many people use toxins to treat feather mites. The common one, marketed for dogs, is said to lower dogs' life expectancy three to four years. Now, if people are putting it on feathers, the horses go out, the poison gets into the grass and soil. The poison gets brushed onto grass and enters into stems via roots while also leaching into ground water. This is not good. Eating and drinking poison should not be a viable option. Yet, according to my research, it is the standard practice. Heads up.

The answer is a routine that keeps skin and hair healthy yet inhospitable to mites. Keep legs, as you should on any horse, clean and dry. It is best to groom daily, before and after work. For bathing, I recommend using an all-in-one shampoo with no sodium chloride (salt) that is rich in aloe vera and uses only the highest-grade tea tree oil; medical-grade. Remember: always towel legs dry before putting the horse away.

EJ: What is scratches?

RS: We call crud on heels scratches. It is a fungus that penetrates the skin and grows. When not treated, it can make horses very sore and can even grow into a costly and time-consuming systemic infection.

EJ: How does it occur?

RS: Damp skin is soft. When in a stall or on turnout, the bedding or footing makes micro-abrasions or "scratches" the skin. Fungus enters there and wreaks havoc.

EJ: Where does it usually occur?

RS: Scratches and scrapes are different. Scratches are on horses' heels. Scrapes are not fungal and can be anywhere on the body. Crud can be anywhere on the body, but we only refer to it as scratches when in the heel area.

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EJ: What is the best way to treat it?

RS: Your best defense against scratches is to only put *bone-dry* legs in a stall. When the horses have been out in wet footing, legs should be cleaned and dried completely. This is fundamental to soundness: only bone-dry legs enter a stall. Never brush wet heels.

The whole point of feathers is to protect the foot. However, fungus loves darkness and dampness. If kept clean and dry, there is nothing to scratch and nothing to irritate.

Caution: parched skin has no defense. Most shampoos use salt (sodium chloride) to make lather. This strips coats, leaving skin vulnerable and hair apt to get really dirty, even if it looks clean for a minute.

Medicated shampoos might kill fungus, but if they dry the skin, they are feeding the problem. Use a shampoo that is moisturizing and conditioning as well having a high-grade anti-fungal. Anti-bacterials do not kill fungus. They only take away the skin's defense.

If the scratches are already making heels sore, a salve can break the cycle. You want one that does not clog pores or attract dirt (read: fungus). It should deal with the whole issue to: kill fungus, reduce inflammation, cool, soothe, moisturize and fortify the skin.



Ruthann Smith of Lucky Braids.

EJ: What are some tips to keeping their feathers full and clean?

RS: Beautiful and easy-to-maintain feathers very much come down to daily grooming and not using shampoo, conditioners or detanglers that strips natural oils or suffocates hair, which most do. Watch out for sodium chloride (salt!). This common ingredient used for lather, also parches skin, making it vulnerable to irritants and leaving hair thirsty; grabbing onto dirt. The results are scratches and mites as well as dirty, stained feathers. Coarse Gypsy horse hair is particularly prone to being porous. Stained feathers ruin the picture, even if photoshopped white. Stains are surely worth circumventing. Keep up on them, keep coats healthy, and grooming will be easier. Stains won't get as bad, as impurities won't readily stick.

A truly healthy coat is moisturized, nourished and fortified as well as clean. A good shampoo will save you money by being highly concentrated so you use very little, effective so you need not wash often nor treat crud, and quick to rinse to save time, water and hoof condition. An enriching shampoo will clean white hair as well as other colors. Since the hair is healthy, it will have a big shine and be rich in color and easy to keep clean.

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EJ: What are some tips to minimizing grooming time?

RS: Daily mane, tail and feather care can be really easy and quick while yielding the biggest, fluffiest hair. You may think of big hair as being a labor of love. Turns out, if you follow this paradigm, big hair can be much easier to maintain.

Here is what I suggest:

- The key to great feathers is keeping them healthy, dry and clean. It is actually quicker if you groom them more often. Use a medium dandy brush for daily cleaning. Only brush bone dry legs, and use a soft one on heels to help prevent scratches.
- Use a shampoo rich in aloe and pharmaceutical-grade antiseptic and anti-fungal tea tree oil.
- Use a big comb.
- Feathers are straightforward: comb wet and towel dry vigorously.
- Comb manes and tails when wet, twisting hair and gripping bottom to protect length and roots.
- Always start combing from the bottom as you move your grip up the tail. Organize hair to the roots.

If you use the right shampoo, this will be easy, and you won't need a conditioner or detangler. When it dries, hair will be volumized, spreading/separating instead of knotting. In fact, hair will stay so fluffy you can just shake out shavings, though I recommend picking out manes and tails daily to keep hair organized. Since this method essentially eliminates ringlets, daily care is quick.

World-class groom and braider, Ruthann Smith, teaches best care practices of elite horsemen at Top Turnout Clinics, bilingual groom training sessions, and LuckyBraids.com. Ruthann also developed the award-winning Lucky Braids Coat Care and Braiding Products, making it easier to take better care of horses.

TRAINER Q&A – DIANNE OLDS ROSSI

EJ: How long have you been training Gypsy horses?

DOR: I've had my first two for one year now.

EJ: What do you train Gypsy horses for?

DOR: One stallion was started for long-rein training for a dancing horse. I walked along side while he worked as if under saddle – very technical process. The mare being a seven-year-old broodmare, I broke to ride, and then we continued with movements of half passes, march and bow. We then proceeded to use her for a presentation of "Dance of Silks" where the performer did moves with silks above her head while the rider performed under her.

EJ: What do you enjoy about training Gypsy horses?

DOR: They are gentle and receptive to instruction and catch on quickly.

EJ: How are they different from training other horses?

Ruthann's Recommendation

by Ruthann Smith

As an international groom and braider I wanted products that made it easier to travel and take better care of horses. Everyone had so much stuff and still plenty of problems! So, I worked with a veterinarian and chemist to solve them. Braiding 12,000+ horses, I had plenty of time to study hair and skin as well as figure out a sounder, more well-rounded coat care paradigm. The idea is to use only two to three versatile products that also avert problems. So, the whole system is easier and more cost effective while undeniably yielding the richest and easiest to maintain coats, including manes and tails. The top grooms in the world tested and love the award-winning Lucky Braids All-In-One Shampoo, Whitener/Dry Wash Spray and Handy Salve. They are all you'll need. Lucky Braids All-In-One Shampoo improves coats, kills fungus, brightens coats, rinsed well, makes even white hair glisten and long hair super easy to maintain. The Enzymatic Spray eliminates stains and repels dirt. Handy Salve treats scratches and itching without clogging pores or attracting dirt (the fungus/scratches is in the dirt). Countless people have told me the Lucky Braids Handy Salve has hair growing back in three days on scrapes and rubs – that would minimize scarring, too. Lucky Braids coat care products are in a different league. More information and free shipping is at LuckyBraids.com.



Photo: Davinci Pictures

Dianne Olds Rossi working with Duke of Earl, owned by Celeste Huston.

DOR: I train a lot of exotic breeds – Friesians come to mind, very similar to the Gypsy horses. However being that they are smaller, I had to adjust my thinking on how I would present them since I mainly train for exhibitions. They are similar to Friesians in that you have to build their stamina and gear them up into the bridle so that they utilize all the presence they normally carry. They have a good, calm attitude so training does proceed quickly. They are a heavier breed which might bother some trainers, but I was used to the Friesians so the challenge was minimal.



Dianne rides broodmare, JC, while speaking with Deborah Walters who co-owns the horse with her husband Douglas.

any breed is successful. The two Gypsies I trained turned out very well and they remained attentive and willing throughout their training.

EJ: What can be challenging about training Gypsy horses?

DOR: Mainly that they are a light draft type horse which presents their own unique problems. They are not as light on their feet nor do they have the stamina of a light horse, which makes a trainer shift gears. This is not a bad thing, just something different. On the other hand their nature is quiet, which means a trainer is not fighting a hot horse attitude. The important thing is to realize what they can do and not ask them to do something they are not built to do. This is common to all breeds.

Dianne is the foremost and most widely known trainer of the Equestrian Arts known as "The Dance" or "Haute D' Ecole." An expert of the piaffe and passage, none have been able to match the brilliance and exactness of her horses. As the owner and producer of The Magical World of Dancing Horses, Dianne presents her stunning horses not as a dressage exhibitor, but as an entertainer. Anyone who has had the privilege of seeing this marvelous show will tell you the power of its magic and the beautifully trained horses. To contact Dianne, visit www.worldofdancinghorses.com or call 262-903-7530.

EJ: How does their temperament affect the way you train them?

DOR: Temperament is everything in my training, and if a horse resents having to do what I ask of them, then no horse of

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