

**This month, Michelle helps HW readers with the ins and outs of equine nutrition, as well as offering some terrific tips on training horses to better understand and respect their handlers on the ground and in the paddock.**

*Hi Michelle,*

*I have recently become the proud owner of two very cute, miniature ponies called Banjo and Dexter. I would like to ask for your suggestions about what would be the best food to feed them. We are currently feeding them oaten hay, (along with) Speedy Bet mixed with chafe or Completeo. All day they are in a grass paddock but there isn't much in there. We have Banjo and Dexter in two small separate paddocks. There are six small paddocks which they are rotated though every few days. We are going to start showing them soon hopefully and I'm working them two to three times a week, including walking them on the road, jumping and trotting around an area.*

Hello Abbey!

As I wanted to make sure that we got the best diet recommendations for Banjo and Dexter, I asked the experts at Mitavite for some help. This is something any HorseWyse reader can do; just call Mitavite toll free 1800-025-487 or email [mitaviteenquiries@ingham.com.au](mailto:mitaviteenquiries@ingham.com.au) and they will happily give you a diet recommendation for your horse or pony.

For Banjo and Dexter, it is recommended that you feed 0.3 to 0.5kg of Promita per day. Promita is a fully steam extruded, nutrient dense concentrate that will provide all the necessary vitamins, minerals and protein your miniatures will need, as long as you feed the correct amount of roughage (ie pasture, hay or chaff). The protein and amino acids in Promita will promote muscling and

top line, the vitamins and minerals will support wellbeing and the safe energy will help to promote more body cover.

If you also feed 10 to 30mls of Performa 3 Oil it will help provide more bloom and a nice shine on their coats for showing. When feeding oil, always start with 5mls and then increase by 5mls per day until the desired level is achieved to ensure the ponies get used to the oil in their diet.

With the Promita and Performa 3 Oil you should also feed approximately 0.5kg of oaten chaff, 1 to 1.5kg of oaten hay, and 0.25kg of Speedibeet. Having Dexter and Banjo in paddocks full time is a great idea and it gives them the opportunity to eat pasture to top up their diet (as well as to exercise and do all those other important things that a horse or pony should be doing!).

You mention that you are rotating the paddocks every few days. The crew at Mitavite recommended that if you could stretch this to 5-6 days per paddock you would be able to give each paddock 4-5 weeks to regrow. Doing this may enable the grass to grow a bit more, which could possibly allow you to reduce the amount of hay you are feeding.

As with any feeding program, you should continue to watch Banjo and Dexter closely. If you see any change in condition, performance or behaviour alter the amount you are feeding.

Good luck Abbey and if you need any more help, please feel free to contact Mitavite.

*Hi Michelle,*

*My name is Luella and I own a 19-year old QH chestnut mare named Shannon. She's really good to handle, EXCEPT when it comes to floating! Actually, more just when it comes to unloading! She'll self-load and travel fine but when it comes to unloading, she'll pull back and come out (of the float) really fast, which is really scary!! I used to be not as worried floating her, but I think it's getting worse and it's making me really nervous. We have a double float and I've tried everything...but she still pulls back, even if she is let out before my other horse Snowy. BUT, she does seem to know how to come out properly, because sometimes she'll do it really well and just walk out nicely. She is also fine in angle loads and trucks; it's just straight load floats that worry her. What can I do?? Please help!!*

Hello Luella!

It can certainly be very scary when a horse comes off a float quickly and you have no control over them or the situation.

Something you don't mention in your letter is if Shannon backs well on the ground, when she is away from the float. So this is the first thing we need to check. You need to be able to back Shannon up, one step at a time, slowly and calmly. Using your voice is a big help (I like to be able to get all my horses to back on voice command), as it helps me not only on the ground but also when I ride them and back them under saddle.

I teach my horses to back by:

1. Standing at the horse's head, and facing towards the rear of the horse, stand slightly to the side

2. Apply a light pressure to the halter through the lead rope
3. Repeat the word "back"
4. Walk towards the horse in a calm and steady motion
5. As soon as Shannon takes a step back, release the pressure on her nose; this is her reward
6. Keep repeating the process over time until she walks backwards with no nose pressure, but simply on your voice command

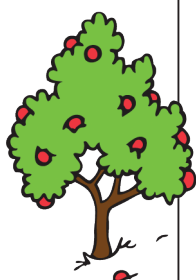
Once Shannon is doing this on the ground you can work on her backing out of the float.

Firstly make sure you have lots of time when you start working on this and have your float parked somewhere safe; the last thing you want is for Shannon to pull back and get away. You should also have an experienced horse person or family member there to help you and make sure you and Shannon are safe and not putting yourselves at any risk.

I would work on getting Shannon to walk on and off the float calmly and slowly. Start with just a couple of steps onto the tail gate and then back Shannon off. Repeat the process, working her further into the float each time.

If at any time, Shannon becomes stressed or rushes off the float, go back the last point where she walked calmly on and off and see if you can get her to back off calmly.

A problem like this is not one that you can solve overnight, so remember the more time you put into practising, the better the chance that Shannon will stay calm about backing off the float.



The cute foal featured in these pictures is Addicumbene Splinter, as part of her very first lesson in backing! Backing up; pulling and walking backwards



Releasing when the horse steps backwards (note the licking and chewing).

It is often recommended that when letting a horse go you turn around to face the gate you have just come through; that way your horse cannot take off forward; he has to turn away from you to return to the paddock.

**Hi Michelle**

*Over the past year I have had the privilege of owing a horse. My horse is a 19yr old TB gelding and recently I have started to notice he has a bad habit. The habit just keeps getting worse and I just about tried everything but nothing seems to work.*

*Every time I go to take his halter off, he canters off and starts kicking and pig rooting before I have fully removed his halter. He will also get caught in the halter and lead rope if I don't get away quick enough. I want to have the best relationship with my horse, so I was wondering if you would know how to stop or prevent this from happening.*

Hello Chelsea

As you have learnt from personal experience, it can be very dangerous when a horse takes off without thinking about who or what is around him.

I always make sure that when I let a horse go I put the lead rope around their neck before I take the halter off. That way, as you undo the halter, you still have control of your horse. Once you have undone the halter completely you can gently remove the rope from around their neck.

To ensure that your horse does not try and pull away from you when you just have the rope around his neck, practice making him soft and supple to just the rope around his neck; be sure you can lead him and can get him to walk in different directions with just the rope, before letting him go. And remember, the closer the rope is to his ears, the more control you will have.

Something else you could possibly do is to let your horse go in a small yard before returning him to his paddock. That way, he has nowhere to run when you do let him go. But with everything we do with horses, please ALWAYS make sure that you are safe and if you are feeling unsafe, then ALWAYS ask someone to help you. Good luck!



Holding the rope around the horse neck when taking the halter off



What we are aiming for; a horse happy to hang out with you and not leave in a rush



Photo by Andrew Hennell

**michelle o'neill**



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