

Speed horses are often 'bleeders'

If a speed event horse has blood coming out of its nose after competition, there could be a serious, but not uncommon ailment.

"Horses that have extreme exercise are prone to be 'bleeders,'" said Dr. Jennifer MacLeay, Colorado State associate professor of large animal internal medicine.

Specifically, Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse and Standardbred race horses and some eventing and barrel racing horses have the problem, she added.

"Any horse that breathes real hard at the gallop could suffer. Scoping horses after races show that as high as 80 to 90 percent can have evidence of bleeding," MacLeay continued.

Technical name for bleeders, or horses bleeding from the nose after stress, is exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage (EIPH).

"This is a condition in which the tiny blood vessels in a horse's lungs rupture due to stress sustained during physical exertion," MacLeay defined.

"The degree of the problem varies from horse to horse, and there are many controversial opinions about bleeders' cause, prevention and treatment," according to MacLeay.

Considerable research has been done on the problem and is continuing. Bleeders will be one focus

for an in-depth international conference on equine exercise physiology this summer in Fontainebleau, France. Similar conferences are conducted on the subject every three years, MacLeay noted.

Actually, bleeding occurs in three variations. Simple EIPH is an acute condition resulting from the strain of exercise. Patent pulmonary hemorrhage (PPH) involves bleeding in the lungs as a reaction to an allergen, infection or hypertension.

Some horses experience composite bleeding, which is the result of the combined effects of EIPH and PPH.

"One theory about how bleeding occurs is that it might be the natural consequence of strenuous running due to the layout of the horse's organs, and the way

the equine body moves during high-speed galloping," MacLeay said.

The lungs are filled with tiny air sacs and capillaries. These efficient, extremely fine capillaries are repeatedly impacted by the forward-surfing intestinal mass.

As they rupture, under the stress, the horse's air passages become clogged with blood. Obviously, this causes difficulty in breathing and running.

"However, once a horse changes profession, such as moving from a race horse to a riding horse, the problem resolves," MacLeay commented.

There is no known method of prevention, other than treatments once the ailment occurs.

Horses will heal naturally over the course of several days, but the problem

will arise again at the next point of exertion. There are various medications used to decrease the severity, with considerable controversy about the effectiveness.

"Most common treatment for bleeders is the medication sold under the trade name of Lasix, although there are continuing questions about how it works," MacLeay acknowledged.

Many trainers use Lasix in their horses. "Legality of use varies from state to state and the regulations for the sport the horse is being used for," MacLeay emphasized.

Lasix is the medication Furosemide, that is a powerful diuretic which causes fluids locked up in the horse's body tissues to be released and expelled in the urine. This has the effect of lowering the horse's blood pressure in the capillaries, and the horse's performance returns to a normal level.

Some experts contend that Lasix has a stimulating effect on horses that en-

hances their performance. Others suggest that the volume of liquid lost by the horse can cause it to lose as much as 20 pounds, giving it a weight advantage.

There are also those who suggest that the increased urinary output of the horse flushes away other illicit performance-enhancing substances in the blood.

Phenylbutazone, commonly called Bute, is the only medication besides Lasix permitted in a horse's bloodstream during a race.

"Bute is used like aspirin to fight inflammation and fever. It numbs pain in a horse, but it may also increase the problem of bleeding because it thins the blood," MacLeay commented.

While bleeders are a common problem for most race horse owners, the ailment is more common in eventing. A horse with a bleeding nose often shocks owners unaware of what is happening.

For more information on the diagnosis and prevention of treatment for bleeders, MacLeay

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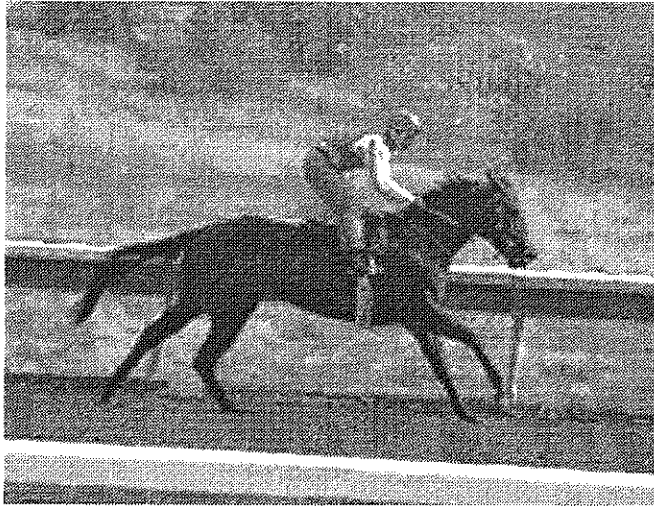
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While bleeders are a common problem for most race horse trainers, who have learned to manage the ailment, a horse with a bleeding nose often shocks owners unaware of what is happening.

A veterinarian can offer advice and prescribe treatment for bleeders, MacLeay insisted.



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