

Estimating a horse's weight

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A quick guide

Table 1 (below) is purely a guide to the average weight of a particular type. Variations from the average can at times be quite extreme.

Introduction

Knowing the weight of your horse at any particular time is important because:

- many medication doses, such as those that control internal parasites, are based on weight; and
- rations for performance and breeding are based on weight.

Control of internal parasites

These days it is recommended that virtually all drenches be used according to the size (weight) of a horse. It is very easy to underdose or overdose a horse if you do not know its approximate weight.

Inaccurate dosing can lead to poor control of internal parasites and inefficient use of the drench, not to mention the potential harm overdosing may cause to the horse.

Underdosing is one of the major causes of the development of resistance to particular drugs by some parasites.

Feeding and performance

It is expensive to feed performance horses. Relying purely on a visual means of determining a horse's performance when it is on a particular feed can be misleading and lead to higher costs.

Rations designed for horses should be based on the horse's weight and its expected performance, i.e. racing, weekend riding, lactation, growth or maintenance.

By knowing a horse's weight, you will at least know accurately the amount of feed required to maintain that weight. Rations can then be designed over and above this to achieve a particular function.



Figure 1. Your veterinarian will administer a stomach drench according to your horse's weight.

Estimation

There are a number of measuring devices that can be used for estimating a horse's weight. However, from various trials carried out by NSW Agriculture (now NSW DPI) at Orange, Scone and Goulburn, one of the most accurate means of obtaining an estimate of a horse's weight is by using the following formula:

$$\text{Weight (kg)} = [\text{girth (cm}^2\text{)} \times \text{length (cm)}] \div 11\,000$$



Table 1. Approximate guide to weights of horses by type and size

Type	Height at withers		Weight (kg)
	(hands)	(cm)	
Shetland	8–10	81–102	200–225
Pony (small, saddle)	10–12	102–122	225–350
Pony (large)	13–14	132–142	250–360
Galloway	14–15	142–152	275–400
Lightweight hack	15–16	152–163	350–500
Heavyweight hack	16–17	163–173	450–600
Draught	16–18	163–183	550–800

The girth is measured as shown in Figures 2 and 3. The length measurement is taken from the point of the shoulder to the point of the buttock (Figures 2 and 4). It is more accurate to run the tape along the animal, with the tape touching, rather than to stand back and estimate these points.

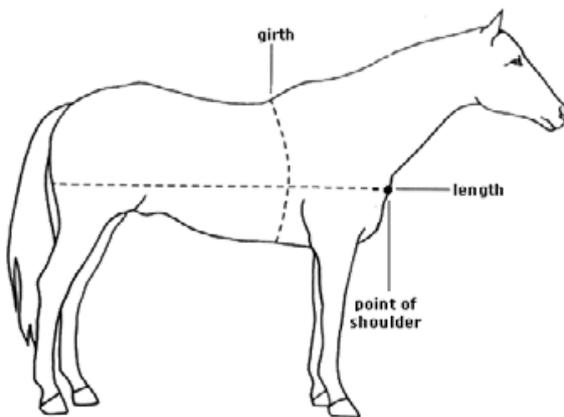


Figure 2. Length is measured from point of shoulder to furthest extremity.



Figure 3. Measure the girth (in centimetres) and square the measurement.

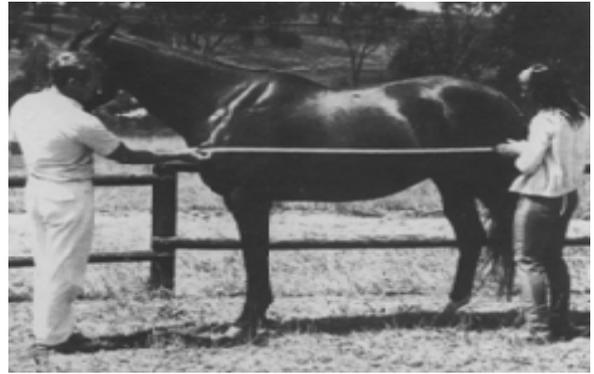


Figure 4. To measure the length, run the tape from the point of the shoulder to the point of the buttock.

This method still provides only an estimate of a horse's weight. Although the method has been found to be fairly accurate in most cases, there have been instances where the estimated weight and the actual weight of the horse have differed by as much as 50 kg.

Weighing



Figure 5. Only scales can give an accurate measurement of your horse's weight. Some horses may need coaxing to step on the metal platform.

The use of weighing platforms is the only true means of obtaining a horse's accurate weight. There are many types of weighing platforms

commercially available, with varying degrees of accuracy and cost.

It is well worth inquiring after the type that will best suit your needs.

Most weighing platforms have been designed for weighing cattle and will need some modification for use with horses.

Adequate safeguards should be taken with weighing platforms to ensure the safety of horses. Sharp edges, and areas where feet and legs may get caught, should be eliminated. This is particularly important when weighing is carried out in a crush. The weighing platform should fit neatly up to both sides of the crush.

The noise level of metal platforms often causes problems with horses. This can be overcome by laying rubber matting over the platform.

Side panels on the crush should be at least 1.4 m high to ensure secure containment of the horse.

Further information

For further information, contact your local veterinarian, or your NSW DPI District Livestock Officer.

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