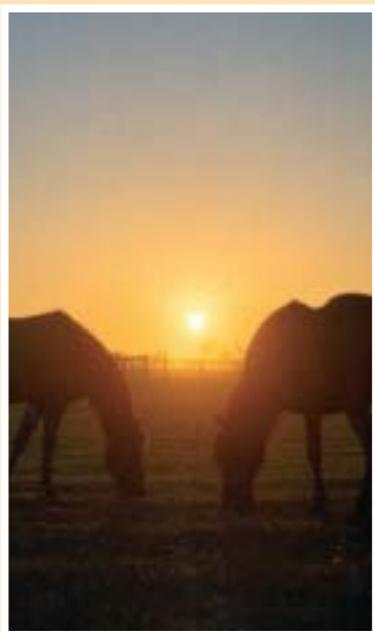


# Retiring Gracefully



*As with all other aspects of caring for a horse, retirement needs will depend very much upon the individual's temperament and circumstances.*



*The Charity's purpose is to provide and promote the welfare, care and protection of horses, ponies, donkeys and mules.*

# Redwings Welfare

As a retirement sanctuary, Redwings specialises in the care of all types of equines who are not able to enjoy a working life. Retirement can become necessary for a variety of reasons, including disease, injury or old age. Every day we receive requests from people wanting their horse, pony or donkey to retire with us and benefit from the facilities and knowledge we have at the Sanctuary. Unfortunately, it would be impossible to take in every animal whose owner made such a request and, as a welfare organisation, our priority is and will remain the rescue and care of equines in the greatest need.

It is hoped that by reading this leaflet, anyone who owns, cares for, or is thinking of taking on a horse, pony or donkey may still benefit from Redwings' experience and be prepared for the long term commitment involved in keeping an equine.

## **How long do horses live for?**

As veterinary science advances and develops new treatments, horses are able to live longer than ever before. Although the specific age an individual will live to is dependent on many things, including breed, conformation, background and living environment and can never be predicted, any new owner should be prepared for their horse to live past thirty. Even finer breeds such as Arab and Thoroughbred can be healthy and active in their thirties and



*Jacko, still enjoying life at 39.*

Redwings has several native ponies living quite happily and independently in their forties. Donkeys as a species have the greatest longevity of all and have been known to live to over fifty.

## **When does a horse need to retire?**

This question is even more difficult than the last to answer precisely. Retirement can become necessary at any age, through an injury which has caused long term damage, an incurable veterinary condition or severe behavioural problems. Some animals are born with problems that mean they can never work and are retired from the very beginning. As any healthy horse ages, its body naturally shows signs of wear and

# Retiring Gracefully

tear. Older horses also become less resistant to injury and disease, which increases the chance of them developing a problem which affects their ability to work.

Redwings always recommends that an owner consults their veterinary surgeon should they have any doubts at all about their horse's ability to cope with what is being asked of it. A rider or driver should also be sensitive to any changes in their horse's performance or disposition which may indicate that it is struggling with exercise it previously undertook as a matter of course. Pain is not always accompanied by an obvious physical symptom like lameness and the sudden development of bad habits like napping or bucking may in fact be the animal's only way of telling us that something is wrong.

## What does retirement involve?

As with all other aspects of caring for a horse, its retirement needs will depend very much upon the individual's temperament and circumstances. A horse who has been diagnosed with the first stages of arthritis can often be retired gradually, still enjoying light work and its condition being monitored to allow for an appropriate level of activity with the guidance of a vet. This easing into retirement can be much easier for both horse and owner as it allows each to adjust gradually to the change of routine and expectation.

However, an adjustment period is not always possible. If complete retirement is necessitated more urgently, it can be a traumatic experience for active, energetic animals, perhaps made worse by the stress



*Company is particularly important for equines without the routine of a working life.*

# Redwings Welfare

of the illness or injury which has led to its withdrawal from working life. It is important to support a horse which finds its world suddenly turned upside down, spending time with it and thinking about its needs, regardless of the disappointment of its retirement for the owner.

Whatever the circumstances and process of retirement, it is vital that the basic physical and mental needs of the horse, pony or donkey are met fully and consistently. To turn an equine out and hope that it will look after itself is not acceptable. Retired equines may be able to 'rough off' and return to a more unkempt appearance than working horses, but their body will require the same level of monitoring, and, if necessary, additional help and support to maintain condition. Retired equines also need the stimulation and security of company, preferably that of other equines, but otherwise from regular interaction with humans.

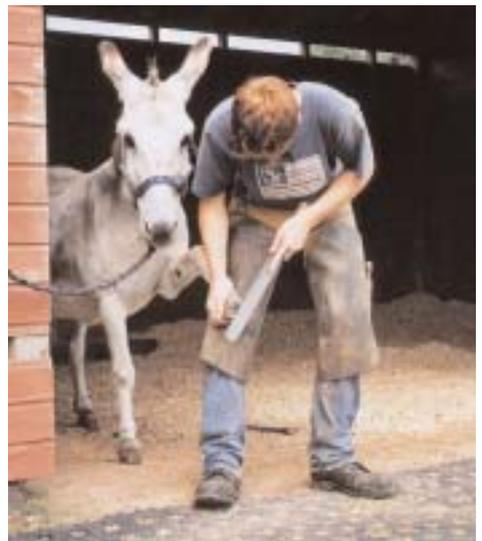
## Is keeping a retired horse cheap?

The simple answer is no. Keeping any horse will never be cheap if it is cared for properly. There are naturally certain items which may not be needed once a horse is retired. Unless remedial shoes are needed, most retired horses can be kept unshod and the amount of feed needed can sometimes be reduced, particularly if the horse is kept at pasture. However, any equine, whether in work or not, will always need regular foot

trimming, worming, vaccination and dental checks. Any horse retired through age or infirmity is also more likely to require extra care in the form of feed supplements, medication and veterinary visits. Insurance may also be much harder to secure.

## What are the alternatives?

Many people find the cost of keeping a horse they cannot ride prohibitive, particularly if they have to rent stabling and grazing, or are keen to take on another equine with which to continue riding or driving. Very few owners can be lucky enough to secure a place for their horse in a sanctuary and most have to make a difficult decision regarding their animal's long term future. There are a few options worth considering and looking into carefully.



*Retired equines must have all their needs met to keep them happy and healthy.*

# Retiring Gracefully

## *Downsizing*

Rather than paying high livery fees at a yard with riding facilities, consider that a retired horse or pony may be quite happy in a rented field living out with other equines. Sharing the field also means sharing the rent and even some of the chores, so everyone can benefit. It's always worth asking around and putting up a few cards in local feed merchants and saddleries.

## *Loan*

It is a lot to expect someone to take on the cost of an equine that they cannot ride, but there are a significant number of owners who want a companion for their riding horse without the pressure of finding time to exercise two animals. Again, it's a question of spreading the word and spending time actively looking for a good loan home. Any loan arrangement should always be talked through honestly and carefully by both parties before being put in writing. An example of a written loan agreement can be found on the British Horse Society website at [www.bhs.org](http://www.bhs.org).

## *Retirement livery*

Increasingly, there are more livery yards opening around the country which specialise in caring for retired equines. This solution will still involve significant financial commitment, but has the benefit of continued control over decisions made with regard to the care of the horse and the reassurance of a professional service if the establishment is carefully selected and checked out.



*Top, letting a retired horse lead a more natural life should not mean neglecting it.*

*Below, the same horse after just three months of routine care at Redwings.*

## *Euthanasia*

A large number of horses and ponies that are no longer able to fulfil their role as riding or driving animals are put to sleep every week. This is distasteful, even offensive to many people, but simply common sense to others. Ultimately, if a knowledgeable and caring home cannot be secured, this is certainly not the worst possible outcome. As an active welfare organisation, everyday Redwings sees the unhappy fate of horses that no-one wants. We hear of animals which are sold on and sold on, never being given the chance to settle in a home, with veterinary problems being made worse through lack of proper diagnosis and treatment. Ultimately, euthanasia is a lawful, legitimate choice, whereas neglect or dishonest selling-on is not.

# Redwings Welfare

## *Planning ahead*

Keeping any animal is a huge commitment and needs careful thought, not just with regard to the immediate responsibilities, but also the long-term implications and costs. What will happen if your pony-mad child loses interest? How does a horse fit in with your plan to retire abroad? Will you still have the time and money when you want to start a family? Any prospective owner should always also consider the future retirement needs of their equine and be aware that retirement may become necessary at any point. By thinking and planning ahead, an owner is not only being realistic, but can take practical steps to reduce the chances of unforeseen problems spoiling the real pleasures of equine ownership.

## *Initial vetting*

It may seem like just another expense at the time, but the importance of asking an experienced veterinary surgeon to examine a horse prior to purchase cannot be overestimated. Even an indestructible-looking cob that is only going to be used for hacking out could have a huge number of existing or potential problems lurking beneath the surface. By having the horse vetted, you will not only be reassured that it is generally problem free, but that its conformation and general health does not predispose it to particular problems which could lead to untimely retirement. Of course there are never any guarantees, but



*Vetting a horse before purchase is not a guarantee, but well worth the expense involved.*

minimising the risks can later save time, money and heartache.

## *Insurance*

Equine insurance is notoriously expensive and does not tend to provide ongoing financial support for long term veterinary conditions. This is largely because equine problems are so expensive to treat. Insurance is still vitally important as a safety net against unforeseen circumstances for many owners. Not only the cost of expensive treatments (colic surgery is not uncommon and can amount to thousands of pounds) can be claimed for, but loss of use insurance also provides a lump sum should an equine develop a problem which necessitates early retirement. The payment is generally designed to fund the purchase of another horse, but can also be used to help put retirement plans in place and at least take some of the pressure off an owner whilst decisions are made.

# Redwings Welfare Contacts



*Insurance can help cover the cost of operations and other expensive treatment.*

## *Rainy day savings*

Even with insurance cover, it is important to have other resources to draw upon. Horses are expensive and it can be easy to drain the bank balance every month in order to cope, but this leaves both horse and owner very vulnerable to even small problems which need a little extra funding. Putting just a small amount into an emergency account every month can soon add up and make a big difference to a horse and owner in a difficult situation.

## *Final decision*

Should the worst happen, remember that putting a horse to sleep is also expensive and Redwings often receives calls from people whose choices have become even more difficult because of practical financial limitations. It's not something any owner wants to have to think about, but avoiding the issue can mean far greater trauma if the unthinkable does occur. As well as having emergency finances available, look into disposal options, legal requirements

(remember that since 2003 it has been illegal to bury equines without special permission), costs and procedures and have relevant telephone numbers to hand. Being prepared will have been a kindness to yourself and your horse should these numbers be needed.

## **Veteran Horse Society**

Hendre Fawr Farm  
St Dogmaels  
Cardigan  
Wales SA43 3LZ  
0870 2426653

## **British Equine Veterinary Association**

Wakefield House  
46 High Street  
Sawston  
Cambridge CB2 4B

## **British Association of Equine Dental Technicians**

The Bungalow  
Bone Hill Road  
Mile Oak  
Tamworth  
Staffordshire B78 3PS  
01827 284718  
[www.equinedentistry.org.uk](http://www.equinedentistry.org.uk)

## **Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria**

Nunclose  
Armathwaite  
Carlisle CA4 9JT  
01252 844478  
[www.appcc.org.uk](http://www.appcc.org.uk)

# Redwings Welfare Information

Redwings' Welfare Team is proactive in the promotion of equine care and welfare, believing that access to accurate and up-to-date information is vital if owners and carers are to meet the needs of their animal.

Redwings' welfare leaflets are designed to provide an overview of many important issues which are encountered regularly in welfare cases with which the Sanctuary is involved. The series includes information on the following topics:

- **Laminitis**
- **Hoof Care and Farriery**
- **Worms and De-worming**
- **Food, Digestion and Energy**
- **Veteran Horses and Retirement**
- **Horse Psychology**
- **Donkeys**
- **Equine Welfare and the Law**

To request copies of leaflets or to speak to one of the team about any equine welfare issues, please feel free to contact the department by post, phone or email.

## **The Welfare Team**

Redwings Horse Sanctuary

Hapton

Norwich

NR15 1SP

Tel: 01508 481008 (8.30am - 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Email: [info@redwings.co.uk](mailto:info@redwings.co.uk)



**Redwings Horse Sanctuary**  
General Enquiries 01508 481000  
[www.redwings.co.uk](http://www.redwings.co.uk)