

End of Year Time Off: to each their own

by Holly Grayton



Do you ever get to the end of show season and wonder what you should do about time off for your horse? Me too! So I asked around to know what other professionals do to rest their show horses before the next season starts.

The general consensus is each rider and horse's situation

is unique.

Renowned Alberta-based equine physiotherapist and body worker Tina Watkins says that every horse needs a rest, but we need to decide what that means for each athlete. Some might be totally off in the field, and others may continue to work in a lighter fashion.

California legend Susan Hutchison (veteran of World Championships and many Nations Cup and World Cup Final) says she gives her horses time off with "light rides; there's no time to let them down completely anymore!"

Alex Grayton of Calgary has a slightly different take: "I think the perfect situation is to give the horses 2-4 weeks completely off, then bring them back to full work over the course of the same length of time as the break (2-4 weeks). Coming back to work would include trail riding, light rides and gradual ramping

up of work." He adds "It is also important to find time throughout the year for a week of rest every now and then, whether it's light trail or forest riding or total time in the field."

Brenda Riddell also from Calgary finds a solid block of time for her horses to rest. "I generally lay them off for 6 - 8 weeks. It is my understanding that they start losing their fitness after two weeks, but will maintain some level, depending on how fit they were in the first place, for up to six weeks. When I start back up they are not starting from ground zero, which is in my mind when injuries could start to happen. I also look at each of the horses, and what I am trying to achieve with the layoff: what each of their physical issues are, how old they are, whether they need a mental break or physical break and design my layoff strategy accordingly. Each of the horses still go out every day, on the hot walker twice a day, and on the vibration plate, even during their layoff."

I had the same horse for a long time, and he always had 4 weeks totally off at the end of his show season – he wouldn't even come to the gate he loved his full outside days so much! By the end of the time off he was eager when I came around, so then I knew he was ready to go back to work. My current horse, however, is much different. He's a real work horse (no pun intended) and I have so much fun riding him. I have to force myself to leave him alone, so at the advice of the professionals in his life this winter we have done a lot of walk/trot rides and lunge days to give his body a break while keeping him from getting too WILD!

So long story short: every horse is an island, and your coach, vet and body workers can give you some insight into what would be best for their body, mind and spirit. 🐾

