

TO BLANKET OR NOT Jim, The Feed Guy·
So I know that I'm a "feed guy" but I am also a horse keeper and every winter I see a whole bunch of blanket wars some up in various groups so I thought I would add my opinion and observations to the mix.

This photo was taken yesterday as my three Quarter Horse mares stuffed themselves with free choice hay which, as you can see, they are not shy about wasting.

They are standing outside in a steady 30 mile per hour wind with snow blowing horizontally. This is their choice because 100 feet away they have access to their stalls which are bedded with a foot of straw, heated buckets and a pile of exactly the same hay.

These mares would much prefer to be outside than in. However, if they were not wearing blankets they would most likely be huddles in their stalls against the wind.

I point this out because while it is mostly true that horses will survive the cold weather as long as they have shelter and forage it is equally true that blanketing them can be very beneficial.

Every year I see newbies posting advice on blanketing and so many of the comments are from the "I've been around horses my whole life" crowd advising that "horses don't need no damn blankets!".

There are also many comments spewing myths that blanketing is dangerous and will "make a horse sick".

These ideas are, in my own humble opinion, nonsense.

To be sure over blanketing can be a real problem as it can cause some issues with heat stress. The only problem I ever had with blankets was a boarder of mine who had a OTTB and insisted that if she were cold the horse was too. I was constantly removing heavy second blankets because the animal was dripping in sweat while the temperature was 34 . Tossing a horse out in 25 F weather with only a thin sheet can be equally problematic. In general if you use a sensible strategy of midweight fill blankets you really can't go too far wrong.

But why blanket at all? Wild horses don't wear blankets!

Unfortunately the people with this attitude never have the opportunity to see the frozen carcasses of the wild horses that NEEDED BLANKETS.



The ginormous fat ass on the left side of the two in front is my 22 year old AQH mare, Flair. When Flair was young she would be standing outside grazing while covered with ice from freezing rain and not wearing a blanket. She much prefers being a little on the chillier side. I noticed that when she turned around 15 she would start hanging out in the shelter for much longer periods.

The fat ass on the right is my 32 year old AQH mare, Skippy the Wonder Horse. She is an older lady who prefers being comfortable.

Would these lovely matrons survive the winter without blankets? Almost surely!

So why do I blanket them?

The first reason is obviously to help them be more comfortable.

The next reason is that they will stay out of their stalls moving around which is great for both their physical and mental well being. As an added benefit for me, less mucking to do.

The third reason is that they will consume less hay which is a great budget consideration.

Why spend money on hay if I can prevent them from burning calories just to stay warm?

The final reason is that blanketed horses will drink more water which avoids things like winter impaction colic.

One horse that is not in this picture is my beautiful Raven. Ray was an OTTB mare, granddaughter of Secretariat that unfortunately, at the ripe old age (for an OTTB) of 28, succumbed to an old tendon injury this past August.

Blanketing for Raven was not optional. She was a typical thin skinned Thoroughbred.

She was 14 years old the first winter she came to me and she grew a luxurious, thick coat as beautiful as any sable cape ever worn. We had one night where the temperature was 40 F with a light drizzle of passing showers. When I went out for morning feed she wouldn't come up to the barn.

Fearing the worst I grabbed her halter and walked out to lead her in. She was shivering so violently that she could barely walk. From that moment on Raven was blanketed any time the temperature dropped below 50 F and she was always a plus one so if the Quarter Horses needed a blanket Raven had two.

In my travels as a "feed guy" I encountered so many owners who refused to blanket their horses while complaining that they were hard keepers. I was forced to stand there with their miserable, shivering horses in cross ties and restrain myself from beating them with a dressage whip.

This message is for the owners who have been shamed or misinformed out of blanketing your horses. Just do it if you believe that your horse will be better off.

If you go to the barn and your horse is huddled in the run in shed or shivering slightly or is a dripping muddy mess blanketing them will be a benefit.

I feel the same way about shoes. If a horse will benefit from them then put them on.

This is only my opinion, other opinions are welcome but I've cared for lots and lots of different horses over the years and I've never had one that didn't benefit from a blanket.

Cheers!