

Preparing for the Trail Season

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1. Physical Conditioning.

Make sure your equine has a conditioning base before expecting him to tackle the long days and high altitude of the Pecos and the Manzanos.

- Try to ride at least 2 times/ week and take advantage of the training rides.
- 15 minutes of lunging at a trot could help if the conditions don't allow riding.
- Take it slow to start with—lots of walking and some trotting and build up both time and speed.
- Pay attention to your animal. How hard is he breathing? How sweaty is he getting?

2. Mental Conditioning.

Does your equine still remember all the skills she needs for the trail? Here are some things to practice, especially for youngsters. If you need help or want tips, just ask!

- Slickers
- Hobbling
- Standing tied
- Carrying saddle bags
- Backpackers
- Bicycles (not really big for most of our rides)
- Stepping over logs/ rocks/ rough terrain/ bridges/ water
- Riding in groups (take advantage of the training rides); front, back, and middle if you have the chance. Pay attention to who your equine likes and where she likes to be. Accommodate your animal's preferences.

3. Feeding.

- Pellets. Include pellets to varying degrees in your equine's diet if you expect him to eat these happily on over nighters. Start slow (1 lb/ feeding) and build up.
- Green Grass. Most of us do not have access to green grass. But if you do, you can allow your animal some grazing time (start with ½ an hour and gradually build up). If you do not, do not allow your animal to graze more than ½ an hour (say in the Pecos). You may want to bring a grazing muzzle or just put a feed bag on to limit grazing. The danger of over grazing can range from nothing to colic and founder. Founder will ruin your season.
- Increase over all feed quantity if your animal's work level increases a lot.

4. Foot care.

- Have your farrier get those feet in shape a week or so before you start conditioning your equine.
- Shoes and farrier care every 6-8 weeks are the easiest way to keep your animal's feet in good shape over the season. Shoes prevent deterioration of the hoof wall and also reduce bruising, thus keeping your work-partner sound.
- If you want to keep your equine barefoot, be sure she has good solid feet, your farrier is on board with you (or change farriers to one that can support your decision), and be sure to have boots of some sort for the front feet and possibly the hind as well. A few animals will be fine with no boots, but not that many. Easyboot Epics stay on; Easy Boot Gloves are harder to work with, but if they fit right will do well; boa boots are a bit cumbersome and sometimes chafe; I haven't worked with other brands, but some of our members have.

5. Check and Clean Tack.

- Bridles: Check for leather condition and soundness. Pay closest attention to any attachments. Are the screws tight? Consider nail polish or lock tite. Are the ties tight and sound? Are the reins supple or are they cracking? Replace or tighten as necessary. Clean and oil.
- Bits and chin straps: Wash the bit and check for sharp edges and pinching. Tom thumbs; quick bits are notorious. Check the integrity of the chin strap leather and chain. If your chain is rusty and/or sharp, consider replacement.
- Saddles: Check your stirrup leathers and cinches. Replace dry and cracked. Clean and oil the rest.
- Halter and leads: Check for integrity. Replace if necessary.
- Saddle pad: If yours is falling apart, lumpy, or squished, consider replacing. If not, consider cleaning it. The self-service car wash works well. Don't use the soap!