

#3. Unmounted lesson: Does the blanket fit?

Horse Blanket Fit Basics—MODEL: PRACTICE WITH GUIDANCE; PRACTICE INDEPENDENTLY

Follow this five-step check list to make sure your horse's blanket properly fits him. When bundling up your horse this winter, take a minute to check the fit of his blanket. Patterns and cuts from different manufacturers can make supposedly same-sized blankets fit quite differently. And changes in your horse's body condition can cause a cover that fit perfectly last year to be painfully ill-suited for his present profile.

The following five-point blanket check will make sure your horse is both warm and comfortable this winter:

- 1.** Can you slip your hand easily between the blanket and his withers? Continual pressure in this area can produce discomfort or even lasting injury.
- 2.** Is there room to slide a hand up into his shoulder area? Too tight a fit here will rub off hair and cause painful friction injuries.
- 3.** Is the neck cut so your horse can graze without pain? Place a tempting treat at floor level and watch for pressure from the front buckles as he reaches for it.
- 4.** Does the tail flap lift easily when your horse passes manure? An ill-designed or too-heavy tail cover will get in the way of falling manure and become a crusted mess.
- 5.** Does the surcingle have to be adjusted tightly to keep the blanket in place? A blanket cut for your horse's body shape will stay in place without a tight, uncomfortable surcingle.

A "yes" to one or more of these questions means that your horse and his blanket are a poor match. Simple alterations and creative use of fleece can fix some minor fit problems but the best solution may be to replace the blanket altogether. Measure your horse before you go shopping and consult with the sellers about the right cuts and styles for his particular body shape and size. Try each purchase on your horse over a bed sheet; if you have to make a return because of poor fit, it will be clean and hair-free.

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