

# Coping with Heat and Humidity

Just back from an endurance ride in Georgia where in the heat of the day we used every trick in our bag to handle the heat. Here are my suggestions.

**First and foremost, do not let your horse's core temperature get extremely high!** It's a lot easier to keep it down than to get it down once it's up there. The most common mistake I see people make on a hot day is letting the horse trot up steep hills as far as they can before they drop down to the walk. Trotting up a hill requires a lot of energy. Calories burned produce heat—at the *core*, not on the surface. Surface heat (from the sun) is a pain, but core heat is a lot harder to get back down.

Using speed up a hill does not create a breeze, whereas cantering on the flat the extra heat at least gets the reward of a good breeze. So, yesterday we walked hills.

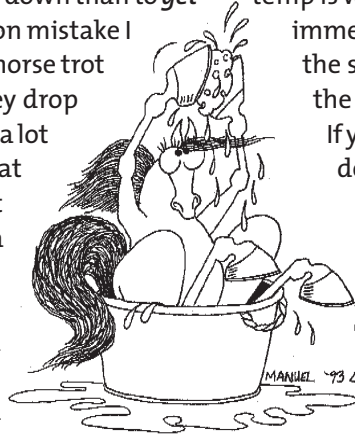
We walked long gradual slopes, and when we got on the flat we probably went faster than usual (fast canter/hand gallop) so we could allow ourselves plenty of time on every slope. (The trail had lots of very slow sections so you had to make time where you could.) If you're riding Jayel Super maybe you can go on up the mountain fast, but if you're on one of mine this helps.

**Shade: use it!** A common mistake is slowing down when you're out in the sun. I know this is different out West, but down here in the rain forest of the Southeast you get 100 yards of sun, then 100 yards of patchy shade. In this scenario, if your horse is having trouble with the heat get across that sun as quickly as possible, then when you get to the shade walk and let your horse get benefit of the shade longer. If one side of the road has shade for goodness sakes get in it!

**Sponge!** Don't snap it back on your saddle, keep it on your hand. Watch out for the puddles in the sun; some of them are literally hot during the summer months, but if you'll practice you can sponge from every shaded puddle on the fly. Yes, I squirt some of my water bottle on too (usually on a hill or going across a sunny patch) but I'll bet I put a minimum of five gallons per loop on my horse yesterday sponging on the fly. Twenty ounces of water doesn't compare.

Go ahead and put water over their back if you're on the trail and going to keep moving. Heck, when that water isn't chilled I don't think you can put too much water over the horse even in camp.

**If your horse is building up heat and you get to a cool stream, stay a while.** And keep putting that cool water on until the



skin quits feeling hot a few seconds later. When the core temp is way up you put water back on and the skin is almost immediately hot again, but when you get that core down the skin will stay cool for a while. (That's what we do at the check when we sponge till the pulse comes down). If your horse is still panting, there's another sign you're dealing with a hot core.

**More shade.** When you're in camp and trying to cool the horse down by putting on water, put him in the shade anyway. If you get wet and stand in the sun, then get wet and stand in the shade; you can still feel that it's warmer in the sun even though you're wet. Use that shade.

**Mane management.** This should be a no-brainer, but if your horse has a long heavy mane for goodness sakes braid it. If you're just heading out for a training ride, a quick french braid will do. I'm amazed at people who will start a 50 on a hot humid day with a long heavy mane hanging down. If you don't like to braid, cut it off.

**Don't use a saddle pad that covers more surface area than necessary.**

**Other cooling hints:** These tips are more for riding than crewing: If you're crewing you can get into the "ice water on chest and legs" stuff. Competitive trail people are big on fanning and though it looked funny to me at the time I'll guarantee that if my horse wasn't coming down and I could grab a piece of poster board I'd get somebody to be fanning while I was sponging. In humid weather at check points, use a sweat scraper to remove the water as soon it feels warm and replace it with cool water.

**Note for riders out West:** The cooling tactics at a check point discussed above work well when heat and humidity combine as there is no evaporative cooling. In low humidity, water applied to a warm horse's skin will quickly evaporate, providing even faster cooling. So the trick is to apply a thin layer of water, let it evaporate, then reapply water, let it evaporate, repeat. Note that one big advantage of applying water to the surface of the horse for cooling the horse is that the horse does not have to cool by sweating which leads to dehydration. So water on the surface of the horse is water the horse does not have to replace by drinking. In fact riders in low humidity areas have to be very careful about dehydration because the horse can lose so much water without appearing to sweat.

—Angie McGhee