

Rollers without padding raise welfare concerns

The forces were similar to that caused by a rider in sitting trot, but directly on the horse's spine

LUNGING in a roller without appropriate padding could compromise horses' movement, performance and welfare, a study has indicated.

Russell Guire of Centaur Biomechanics was among researchers who investigated the pressure caused by a standard roller, with a "fluffy sheepskin" and saddlecloth underneath, with and without training aids.

They found pressure generated by the roller was similar to that of a rider in sitting trot, but unlike a saddle, the roller does not have a tree, so the pressure, "greater than that thought to cause discomfort", is directly on the horse's spine.

Mr Guire, who has researched



Riders have been urged to lunge with suitable padding under rollers that sit directly on the spine. Library image

By ELEANOR JONES

12th and 13th thoracic vertebrae.

"We believe training aids influence horses' posture, but with this pressure caused by the roller, we believe any benefits they may have would be diluted," he said.

extensively in the area, agreed that sufficient, appropriate padding under rollers is a must.

PRESSURE POINTS

"THE other take-home message for me is, the location of pressure changed with the training aid, which is likely to vary depending on the aid and roller design," she said. "This reinforces the importance of padding the roller."

Dr Murray said the extent of the pressure did not surprise her as it has been shown pressure can be higher at some locations under a bridle and under girths. Pressure is not from rider weight, but generated by muscles working under the tack and upwards, from horses' legs hitting the ground.

She added that this study did not compare horses' movement without rollers so the effect the pressure has on gait is unknown, but "marked improvements" have been seen in horses' movement by relieving high pressure under saddles, girths and bridles.

"You'd expect if a horse was

sore being lunged, in poorly fitted or insufficiently padded tack, you'd definitely see a difference in movement and, eventually, muscle development," she added. "So if you do use a roller, make sure it's in a way that's a good thing for the horse, not bad."

British Equestrian Veterinary Association (BEVA) president elect and study co-author Renate Weller told *H&H*: "We need more scientific evidence for 'truths' we take for granted, because we have been doing things a certain way for a long time.

"We all love horses and put a great deal of effort into providing them with the best care, yet many things we do are based on tradition rather than science.

"The number of scientific studies into equestrian practices has been increasing and I welcome any evidence for or against established practices, since it can only lead to an improvement of the welfare of the horse, which is at the core of BEVA's philosophy."

'I welcome any evidence for or against established practices'

RENATE WELLER OF BEVA

extensively on the effects of tack, surveyed 2,600 riders, and found most lunge once a week in a standard roller, in some cases with no padding, and a training aid.

"We modelled our experiment on what people are doing," he told *H&H*, adding that with the training aids, the pressure changed direction and increased towards the back of the roller.

In all conditions there was high pressure directly over the

"We're absolutely not saying don't use training aids, but ensure you use them correctly and with something which gives clearance of the spine as we believe these high pressures could compromise horse locomotion, performance and, if lunging regularly, welfare.

Mr Guire recommended using a saddle, or high-withered pad.

Animal Health Trust senior orthopaedic advisor Rachel Murray, who has also researched

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



Irish eventer **Jonty Evans** is showing "early signs" of progress towards regaining consciousness. The rider suffered a serious brain injury in a cross-country fall on 3 June.



British Eventing chief executive **David Holmes** has been appointed chef de mission for Britain at the World Equestrian Games in Tryon, US, from 11 to 23 September. He said he is "thrilled".



Endurance GB was "extremely proud" to name **Ella Bunting** as the 2018 young rider national champion, having won a 120km ride at Kings Forest on 7 July, on Aly's Estrella De Rock.