



Muscling-Up for the Season Ahead

By Jane Buchan of Baileys Horse Feeds

There's more to a horse in good condition than just body fat and a shiny coat and, whilst you won't achieve a well-muscled horse without the correct work and training, the right nutritional building blocks are essential too.

Whether you consider your horse over or under weight, in order to improve top line and muscle tone, he requires a fully balanced diet to fuel his work and support the body condition you require. If you want him to gain weight, he will need to lay down some body fat and this is simply achieved by ensuring the diet supplies more calories than he requires for his work. Likewise, for him to lose excess body fat, he should consume fewer calories than he requires for work so that his body is forced to start using its own reserves. There are other nutrients, however, which are essential for the working horse and these can make the difference between a horse who looks and performs to his best and one who, frankly, doesn't!

ESSENTIAL PROTEIN

The main component of muscle and body tissue is protein, which is supplied in limited

amounts by forage (grass, hay, haylage), but working horses, and those whose physique we are looking to improve, will require supplementation in the form of a fully balanced compound feed or balancer. Many riders are afraid of feeding protein in the mistaken belief that it is the cause of excitable behaviour – it is not! Fizziness and excitability may be the result of the horse having excess energy through being fed too many calories and not too much protein. Protein is rarely used by the horse's body as a source of energy

(calories) so is not the culprit, but is wrongly associated with fizzy behaviour because higher energy feeds, formulated for heavier workloads, also contain higher protein levels.

