Retirement Planning for Your Equine Partner: Ensuring a Happy, Healthy, and Fulfilling Life After Riding
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For many of us, our horses are completely part of the family and so much more than just riding partners. Their wellbeing remains a top priority throughout their lives, even after their careers may be over. Just as we plan for our own retirement, it is crucial to plan for our horse's retirement, ensuring they enjoy a fulfilling, comfortable, and content life in their golden years.

1. When is the Right Time to Retire?

Choosing the right time to retire your horse is an important decision. There's no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to retirement — it depends on your horse's health, comfort, and zest for life rather than age alone. Here are some signs that retirement may be approaching:

- **Age:** Ageing in horses, like people, is highly individual. Some horses are happily ridden well into their late twenties, while others need a slower pace much earlier.
- **Health Issues:** Chronic health problems such as arthritis, lameness, or recurrent injuries can make it challenging for your horse to continue working or competing.
- **Reduced Enthusiasm:** If your horse starts showing disinterest in activities they used to enjoy or becomes lethargic, it may be a sign that they are ready for a quieter life.
- **Physical Limitations:** Pay attention to subtle physical changes, such as reduced stamina or difficulty maintaining their ideal body condition.

Ultimately, your horse will play a significant role in steering this decision-making process. Seek valuable input from your home team, consult your farrier, vet, and any professionals who know your horse, to help you make this important choice if you're unsure. Many horses benefit from a gradual reduction in work rather than an abrupt stop, allowing their joints, muscles and mind to adjust gently.

2. Choosing Retirement Livery or Staying at Home

While some horse owners may be fortunate enough to provide an idyllic retirement at home or their existing livery yard, others may want to seek other options. Key considerations include:

Home Retirement:	**Retirement Livery:**
• Familiar surroundings and a personal touch • Control over daily routines • Lower costs if you already have the facilities	• Experienced staff who specialise in senior horse care • Small, quiet herds for social comfort • Facilities tailored to older horses and year-round arthritis-friendly turnout

3. Managing Health Issues

As horses age, they may face new challenges — from dental wear and reduced digestive efficiency to joint stiffness or PPID. Regular check-ups and weight monitoring are essential. Consider the following:

- **Senior MOTs**: Schedule regular check-ups with a vet who specialises in geriatric horse care. This includes dental care, vaccinations, parasite control, and monitoring for conditions such as arthritis and Cushing's disease.
- **Nutrition:** Adjust your horse's diet to meet their changing nutritional needs. Many seniors can benefit from senior-specific feeds, formulated with elevated levels of nutrients to support ageing systems e.g. added immune, respiratory and joint supporting ingredients.
- **Medications and Supplements**: Your horse may require medications or supplements for chronic conditions. Consult your vet to determine the best long-term treatment plan.
- **Forage Replacers**: Many seniors with dental issues struggle to eat enough roughage to maintain a healthy weight. Once given adequate fibre from forage replacers such as SPILLERS Speedy-Mash Fibre or Senior Super-Mash many continue to thrive for years.

If you're unsure whether your horse's current diet still meets their needs, speak to one of

our SPILLERS nutrition specialists. Our Care-Line team can help you build a tailored feeding plan that supports every stage of your horse's senior years.

4. Providing a Fulfilling Retirement

Retirement should not mean isolation and inactivity. Just like humans, horses thrive on social interaction and mental stimulation, especially if they've been used to an active life. Here are some ideas for providing a fulfilling retirement:

- **Turnout Time:** Ensure your horse has access to as much turnout as possible, allowing them to graze, move, and socialise with other horses. Movement and social interaction are vital for their mental and physical wellbeing. Try to utilise paddocks that are not too heavily poached in winter to reduce strain on their joints.
- **Social Interaction:** Horses are social, herd animals who enjoy company. Retiring them in a herd or with a companion prevents loneliness and boredom.
- **Mental Stimulation:** Leaving a stable toy with a horse is not effective enrichment if the horse doesn't interact with it. Try different items and ideas to find what works for your horse and offer them for short periods at a time to maintain novelty and interest. Many horses of all ages enjoy a treat ball filled with low-calorie fibre cubes like **SPILLERS High Fibre Cubes** to keep their minds active.
- **Gentle Exercise:** Light exercise such as in hand walks or leading off another horse can help maintain their muscle tone and joint health. Getting out of the yard can offer a pleasant change of scenery and keep your horse engaged, some benefit from going to shows for in-hand veteran classes or just to keep young horse's company. Pole work or stretching exercises can help them stay stronger and maintain topline.
- **Regular Grooming:** Continue to groom and pamper your retired horse, as it promotes bonding and relaxation. It also helps you spot lumps, scratches or changes you could easily miss.

Cherishing the Golden Years

Retirement can feel like the end of an era, but it's also the start of a new chapter. Deciding when to retire, choosing the right living situation, managing health issues, and providing enrichment are all essential aspects to consider. Remember that each horse is unique, so tailor their retirement to their individual needs and preferences. With proper planning and attention, you can ensure that your super senior enjoys a happy and fulfilling retirement, rewarding the years of joy and partnership you've shared.

Need help creating the right feeding plan for your senior horse?
Speak to a member of our friendly **SPILLERS Nutrition Team** for free, personalised advice.

Join the SPILLERS Super Seniors' Club – a supportive online community for owners of

older horses and ponies, packed with expert tips, giveaways, and heart-warming stories. ➜ https://www.facebook.com/groups/spillerssuperseniors

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