Life on the Track: How One South Wales Yard Keeps Native Ponies Happy, Healthy and Moving
Guest blog by Elizabeth Atwell, Hollytree Track System

Life on the Track: How One South Wales Yard Keeps Native Ponies Happy, Healthy and Moving

Published October 30, 2025

Nestled in a steep, wooded valley in Monmouth, South Wales, *Hollytree Track System* is home to two lucky ponies — *Panda*, a 14.2hh Gypsy Cob, and *Toby*, her 12hh mini cob companion. Together, they enjoy a life of movement, enrichment, and freedom on a beautifully designed 250-metre surfaced track that winds its way up and down the hillside.



Building a lifestyle around movement

Elizabeth first built her track around eight years ago for two small ponies who suffered from metabolic issues and couldn’t tolerate grass.

“After they passed away from old age, the track stood empty for a while. Eventually, we decided to carry out full renovations and make the changes we’d always envisioned to better suit larger horses,” says Elizabeth.

While Panda and Toby don’t have metabolic problems, they are both native types prone to weight gain — making the track lifestyle ideal for them.

What does a horse track look like?

The Hollytree Track isn’t a flat or manicured space. It winds through woodland, following the natural contours of the hillside, with sections between two and four metres wide and a few loops to keep the horses moving.

“We actively encourage habitat growth and wildlife within the areas the ponies can’t reach,” Elizabeth explains. “They have hay at feeding stations around the track, browse the hedgerows, and enjoy enrichment such as herbs and dried flowers in what we call our *‘goodie bowls’*. We’ve even built a staircase into one of the steep banks for extra challenge!”

Managing weight and condition naturally

Tracks like Hollytree work because they encourage horses to move — between feeding stations, water, loafing spots, and shelters.

“To truly benefit from a track, it’s important to understand the whole concept. It’s not the same as strip grazing,” says Elizabeth. “Forage should be available 24/7. Combined with movement, mental stimulation, and companionship, the result is a happy, healthy, and active horse.”

Many horses on tracks learn to self-regulate their intake when provided with consistent access to low-sugar forage such as late-cut meadow hay. This can make a huge difference to weight management and body condition, while helping to smooth out sugar peaks and reduce stress.

Beyond the scales – welfare and behaviour benefits

For Elizabeth, the benefits extend far beyond body condition.

“The track ethos is about more than creating a circle around a field. It’s about enrichment

— encouraging natural behaviours like browsing, exploring, and social interaction. It’s had such a positive effect on our ponies’ mental wellbeing.”

Small space? No problem!

One of the most common misconceptions is that track systems require vast amounts of land.

“Our track is just 250 metres long and sits on less than two acres,” Elizabeth shares. “We also have a pig paddock, vegetable patch, and an apiary — it’s amazing what you can fit in with careful planning.”

Surfacing the track makes it usable year-round, but there are creative ways to adapt if that’s not an option — from grass mats to carpet, rubber, or even AstroTurf. Electric fencing can also create a simple summer track that can

Thinking of trying a track system?

Elizabeth’s advice is simple: *start small.*

“Try a summer setup and see how your horses respond. The main principles are freedom, forage, and friends. Give them 24-hour access to movement, low-sugar forage placed in different areas, and a companion to share their space with. You’ll be amazed at the difference in their health and happiness.”

A final word for owners of overweight horses

“Tracks aren’t just for overweight horses — plenty of thoroughbreds and warmbloods thrive on them. But for those carrying extra weight, encouraging gentle, consistent movement and providing low-sugar, trickle-fed forage can transform their health. It helps regulate blood sugar, supports circulation, and reduces frustration. You don’t need to get it perfect from day one — every small change makes a difference.”

Find out more

 (open in new tab)*Paddock Paradise by Jaime Jackson*(open in new tab)
 Horse Track System by Amy Dell(open in new tab)
 Happy Trackin Magazine(open in new tab)

 Horse Track System Community on Facebook(open in new tab)

Follow *Hollytree Track System* on Facebook: (open in new tab)Hollytree Track System(open in new tab)

At SPILLERS™, we're passionate about supporting horses and ponies living active, healthy lives — from weight management advice to feeding for condition. For personalised nutrition support, contact our Care-Line or explore our SPILLERS Slimmers' Club(open in new tab)**.**

Popular Blogs

SPILLERS Daily Balancer vs SPILLERS Original Balancer

With so many balancers on the market, it can be hard to decide which is most suited to your horse.What is a balancer?Balancers are small, nutrient dense feeds (often pellets) designed to provide a concentrated supply of vitamins, minerals and amino acids. Due the low feeding rate - typically 500g per day or a 500kg horse - balancers provide negligible amounts of energy (calories), starch and sugar per daily serving, making them the ideal choice for good doers.

Read now

Which balancer does my horse need?

What is a balancer? Balancers are small, nutrient dense feeds (often pellets) designed to provide a concentrated supply of vitamins, minerals and amino acids. Due the low feeding rate - typically 500g per day or a 500kg horse - balancers provide negligible amounts of energy (calories), starch and sugar per daily serving, making them the ideal choice for good doers.

Read now

Are balancers expensive?

At first glance balancers may seem like an expensive option, but the low feeding rate makes them a convenient and cost-effective solution for good doers...

Read now

Optimal Health During a Heatwave: How to Adjust Your Horse's Diet | Spillers Feeds

With the UK set to have one of the hottest and driest summers on record, most of us are relishing the opportunity for sunbathing and al-fresco dining. But what does this temporary change in climate mean when it comes to feeding our horses?

Read now

Source URL:
https://www.spillers-feeds.com/articles/life-track-how-one-south-wales-yard-keeps-native-ponies-happy-healthy-and-moving