

Horse and rider security essentials

The need to protect our property is an increasingly important factor of modern life and this applies to our horses just as much as our homes. The theft or damage of property is always upsetting but the sentimental attachment to an animal makes the theft of a horse even more traumatic.

While horse insurance can provide cover for the loss of property there are a number of security measures that can be taken to help prevent you becoming a victim of crime.

Keeping Your Horse Safe

Ensuring that a horse is easily identifiable will make it easier to recover if it is stolen and visible forms of identification may also act as a deterrent. Many horse insurance companies also offer reduced premiums for horses that have some form of security marking.

Freezemarking is a quick, humane and simple procedure that acts as a useful deterrent to horse thieves as it is easily visible. The area to be marked (usually the saddle patch) is clipped and cleaned and the branding iron is cooled in liquid nitrogen and applied to the skin. The extreme cold kills the pigmentation in the hair cells so that new hair grows back white, making the mark visible. On grey horses the hair has to be killed permanently by leaving the markers on slightly longer which results in a bald mark.

The companies that provide freeze marking services hold a register of all the horses that they brand and supply the owner with a registration document. Anyone selling a horse with a freeze mark should have the registration document available and the freeze marking company will need to be informed of change of ownership of the horse at the time of sale.

Micro chipping involves having a microchip injected into the skin in the horse's neck by a vet and the microchip used is registered on the 'HorseSafe' computerised system. When a scanner is passed over the microchip on the horse the identification can be matched with the record on the computerised system allowing the owner to be traced. The horse can also be freeze marked with a small symbol indicating the existence of the microchip.

Top tips to protect your horse from theft

- Keep an accurate description of your horse and a set of photographs taken from both sides, front and rear.
- Register your horse on the British Horse Database, which will provide you with an identification document that can be used to prove ownership.
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- Put up signs around the yard and field letting everyone know that your horse is freezemarked.
- Make sure the mark remains visible by clipping over the area in winter.
- Mark your horse's rugs with its freezemark.
- Make sure all yard and field gates cannot be lifted off their hinges and are securely padlocked with a close-shackled padlock and a pad bar when you are not around. Do not use a chain as this can be cut through easily.
- Do not leave a head collar on your horse in the field unless he is difficult to catch.
- Install security lights at the yard that will automatically come on when movement is detected.
- Vary your routine so that thieves will not be able to judge when the yard will be unattended.

Horsewatch

Horsewatch is a scheme set up to connect all horse owners and riders with the intention of improving security and communication. UK Horsewatch Alliance is a group of people from Horsewatch groups all over the country, who meet at regular intervals to work together to provide a network of information and support to combat equine crime. Most groups work in partnership with their local constabularies developing a range of security measures to support the horse owner to prevent the theft of horses and associated equipment.

Keeping Your Tack Secure

Losing tack is not only irritating and costly to replace but can also cause problems with your horse if they have to get used to a new saddle that may not fit as comfortably as the old one that was stolen. The cost of replacing valuable equipment is leading more and more horse owners to add Saddlery and Tack cover to their horse insurance policy, which can be added to an existing horse insurance policy for as little as just over £2.00 a month.

However, as they say prevention is better than cure and it is very important that horse owners try to ensure the safety of their saddlery and other tack by keeping it in a secure environment. Policyholders often think that their tack is covered by their horse insurance policy as long as it is locked away in a tack room. However, this is not the case and most equine insurance companies apply specific terms and conditions to this area to ensure that tack is stored as securely as possible to minimise the risk of theft.

Many companies insist on the fitting of a '5-lever mortice deadlock' on all doors if the tack is not stored at home. A 5-lever mortice deadlock has two significant features: firstly, they are fitted into the door and frame, not surface mounted like a padlock or bolt, which makes it difficult to break open the door or break the lock off. Secondly,

they have 5 'levers' - internal chambers in the lock - that must be operated together to open it. This makes it difficult to pick.

These locks can be purchased from most DIY or hardware stores for around £25-£30. Most come with additional keys and locksmiths can cut more for a small fee.

Other conditions required by horse insurance companies include steel bars or grids on the windows of tack rooms. If tack has to be left in a vehicle, it must be in a locked boot or in the covered luggage area of a locked vehicle. If your horse is kept at livery it may be worth getting together with other owners to invest in new locks and security devices.

Security Marking

One way that horse owners can protect their saddlery and tack from thieves is by security marking. All Horsewatch co-ordinators have access to tack marking equipment and are very happy to come to your yard to apply your postcode on all leather, synthetic and metal equipment. Synthetic saddles are engraved with the postcode on the stirrup bar, leather saddles on the panel under the saddle flap.

Bridles are engraved on the underside of the headpiece of the bridle, where it fits behind the ears of the horse. Horsewatch tries to keep the location of the marking consistent as many police officers who find stolen and lost equipment are not knowledgeable about horses and Thames Valley Horsewatch has published a document to show officers where to look for identification.

Top tips to keep your tack safe

- Security mark all your tack and equipment.
- Fit 5-lever mortice deadlock bolts on tack room doors and bars on the inside of windows.
- Make a comprehensive inventory of your tack and equipment and include relevant descriptions (colour, size, etc.) serial numbers and details of security marking or post coding.
- Keep photographs of any unusual or expensive items.
- Keep all records secure to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands, and they are readily available when needed.

Remember that unless your tack is identifiable by serial numbers, postcode, microchip or other visual method, it is unlikely to be recovered if stolen.