

## Every Little Detail

A series of equine health problems motivated Molly Ashe to scrutinize every aspect of her stable's health and nutrition program.

## By Summer Best

Molly Ashe knows what the top of the world looks like. She's been there. She's seen the glitz and the trophies, the cameras and the cheering crowds. Her success as a rider in the past three years has been extraordinary – complete with almost unheard of and dramatic wins. During the 2000-2001 show season, Molly found herself the champion rider of six major grand prix events back to back.

Media writers called her a show jumping phenomenon.

The icing on the cake? At the end of 2001, Molly's mount, the Dutch Warmblood mare Kroon Gravin, owned by Sandra O'Donnell, was named the American Grand Prix Association's Horse of the Year.

Those were days with many smiles and much celebrating, and Molly and her team were enjoying a dream come true.

"It was so amazing," Molly says. "Looking back now, I can see that everything went far smoother than I could have ever imagined.

"My vet tells me that 2000 was a gift."

## The Bottom Fell Out

If every high has its low, then Molly was destined for a gully. After her 2000 European tour, Molly's stable was jolted with a plethora of bizarre health issues.brains and business

"The horses either got hurt or sick, or whatever," she remembers. "You're just scratching your head – what am I doing wrong? I take it so personally. I've had West Nile Virus problems, strangles, flu rhino...you're just looking over your shoulder. And every time something would happen, I kept saying, 'It can't get any worse.' And then it would."

Then, in 2001, after an eighth-place ride at the Federation International Equestrian Show Jumping World Cup Final in Sweden, Molly again felt something was wrong. Hours later, her instincts proved true: Kroon Gravin became ill on the transatlantic trip back to the U.S.

"They (the airline) tried to take off three times to come home, and they kept having to abort the flight (to take care of the horse)," Molly says. "'Kroon' was 20 hours in the container."

The mare suffered ovarian problems, colic, tying up and more. Finally, Molly decided to take a sabbatical so her entire team could regroup – fully realized that time off would ruin her odds of staying in the U.S. and world show jumping rankings.

More problems were on the horizon. Two grand prix horses needed unexpected surgeries in October 2001. Shortly thereafter, two horses contracted a strand of the flu virus that required three weeks of 24-Dr. Otthour care at Palm Beach Equine Animal Hospital. Later, another show jumper, recovering from a mysterious coffin bone compression, was back in training, only to be followed by an odd, spastic plethora of ills.

“ We ran into lime problems, which we should have tested for,” Molly remembers. “Then we thought a horse had EPM.”

Later, the barn staff nurtured a horse with seizures and possible tumors. The entire team was devastated when a top jumper eventually had to be put down. Kroon Gravin was still dealing with ovarian issues, and another top horse in the barn had colic surgery and visited the veterinary clinic multiple times for surgery in 2002. Turns out, he had severe allergies.

“ We fed him every two hours all day and all night,” Molly remembers.

By this time, Molly didn't know if her stable was haunted or if she was truly losing her mind. Lack of care wasn't really the problem, she says. The horses in her barn are, and were, treated like queens and kings. “There were issues I never considered before, though,” she says. “Things I didn't know things were bad for horses. I used to be careful, but now I'm really, really, really careful.”Molly's stats

### Healthy Priorities

Molly has a stellar reputation for putting her horses' needs first. She's been known to shock teammates and fans by scratching from important events just because something didn't feel just right – even while many other riders might have pressed on or looked for a quick fix.

Today, she's even more cognizant of their needs. Put Molly on the spot, and she'll admit the wellbeing of her horses is far more important than their training routines or competition schedules.

“ I think health comes first,” she says. “If they aren't healthy, then you can't progress with anything else. These horses are roaming creatures that are supposed to be constantly walking and eating. And we take and lock them up in a stall. What kind of sense does that make? So I think we have to emulate their natural environment as much as possible.”

Molly re-evaluates her routine often, and when changes need to be made, she initiates and follows through until she's certain she's offering her horses the very best care. She trusts her veterinarian, Dr. Tim Ober, to advise her on the latest health advancements and procedures, and she trusts her nutrition program to Seminole and Spillers/Seminole Feed.

Horses in Molly's stable eat a complete breakfast, lunch and dinner, receiving hay first. After meals, they are hand-walked or ridden.

"I truly believe all the details are going to pay off ten-fold," Molly says. "Even if it's not in the show ring. If all these careful details make a better life for the horses in the long run, that's success enough for me."

Will Sweat for Beer Old wive's tale? Beer for horses?

Hot, humid climates are catastrophic for horses that cannot sweat efficiently. Because the sweating process creates a type of air conditioning system for the body, a horse that sweats limited amounts – or none at all – suffers dramatically during hot seasons.

Officially labeled anhidrosis, horses with this condition are usually called non-sweaters. Non-sweating performance horses must be monitored very carefully to prevent overheating, heat exhaustion and potential death.

Scientists continue to study the exact causes of anhidrosis, but research shows many horses reach anhidrosis after a period of hyperhidrosis, at which time their bodies were somehow forced into a period of profuse sweating.

A variety of supplements are available at your local feed store to tackle the non-sweating issue – but none have been proven 100 percent effective in all horses. Some forms of acupuncture have also been utilized successfully.

Non-sweaters transported from a hot, humid climate into a cool or drier climate usually fare well. Others seem to re-group after a winter of cooler temps, and when spring comes, they will sweat again.

Molly Ashe has her own secret weapon to combat equine anhidrosis: beer. And not just any beer. Molly took the advice of Jane F. Clark (prominent Olympic horse owner and chairman of the National Baseball Hall of Fame), who recommends only Guinness Extra Stout – a 19th century British brew, which advertises higher alcohol content, more carbonation and "hoppy" flavor than your average American beer.

“We tried it just like Jane said, and you just can’t imagine,” Molly explains. “It’s like a miracle. A bottle in the morning and a bottle at night. You dump it in their feed, and they get real shiny, on top of becoming a better sweater. Jane says, ‘Makes ‘em healthy from the inside out.’ ”

Of course, Molly and her barn manager, Suzie Kaplan, do get a lot of funny stares when they visit the grocery store to purchase the beer in bulk cases. Imagine standing in the checkout line with enough beer to last a full barn of horses two drinks a day for several weeks.

“People start having double-takes when they see us,” Suzie says. “But the horses love it. When Kroon (Gravin) first got the beer in her feed, she did act a little quirky!”

So take heart, all you beer buffs. Get your horse hooked on this, and you’ll have a drinking buddy for life.