

# Polo cuts out the corners

A UK HIGH-GOAL TEAM has become the first major polo set-up in Britain to install a new breed of horsewalker – the oval variety. In the past decade horsewalkers have become the must-have gadget for equestrian yards large and small, but only recently has a more sophisticated take on the round variety been available in the UK.

Enterprising UK firm Horse Weigh, whose main business is professional horse-weighing technology, were the first to introduce the German-made oval horsewalkers to the British polo set.

"I first saw them in the Middle East, then at Equitana, an exhibition in Germany, about four years ago," says William Bedell from Horse Weigh. "It does what the horse does in its natural environment – if you saw a horse going in circles in the field you'd call the vet!"

Horse Weigh took on the exclusive distribution for the UK from the German manufacturer Kraft, and has installed about 20 so far, since selling its first in the UK in 2006. They can be ordered in bespoke sizes ranging from three to 40 horses – the largest measures 100x25m – and can be covered. The two largest oval Kraft horsewalkers to be installed are at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna and at an equine rehabilitation centre in Ireland.

William points out: "The middle can be used for turnout or storage; some of our



This oval horsewalker, installed by Horse Weigh, measures 40x10m and can take up to 24 horses. Evidence suggests the oval shape provides major advantages

clients even have stables installed there. Oval walkers also use less space than their counterparts."

The premise of the oval shape is that it is unnatural and potentially detrimental for a horse to exercise continually in a small circle. This was confirmed when two respected independent UK vets conducted a revealing six-month study at Bristol University in 2006 on the benefits of oval vs round – research commissioned by Kraft and the Welsh Assembly, as the company is based in Wales.

FEI and Badminton Horse Trials vet Paul Farrington and physiologist Dr David Marlin, formerly of the Animal Health Trust in Newmarket, used three fit, sound

Thoroughbreds aged three to 12 in their study, recording their movements on circles and in straight lines. Their research indicated the turning exercise loads horses' bones in a different way to straight lines, and that this may have implications for horses with pre-existing musculoskeletal injuries.

"The advantage of the oval walker," they found, "is that it combines straight line and turning exercise that mimics the exercise a horse will do when ridden or free at pasture. So there appear to be significant advantages to using a walker of oval design as opposed to round."

► *What are your views on round vs oval? Tell us at [letters@polotimes.co.uk](mailto:letters@polotimes.co.uk)*