

NEW PRODUCTS

From our testers, the latest on the newest for horsemen.

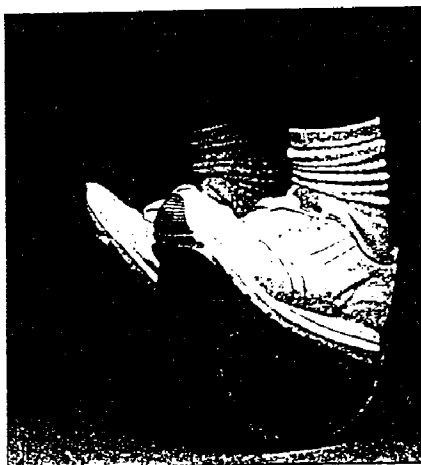


ProStretch®

Tired of hanging your heels out over infinity on your bottom step at home, trying to stretch your leg muscles (and suspecting that most of whatever good you've done is gone by the time you get to the barn)? The ProStretch® leg-stretching and strengthening system, designed originally for runners, may be the answer for you. Rocking back and forth on the ProStretch (which comes with its own free instructional video) enables you to stretch hamstrings, calf muscles, Achilles tendons, and plantar fasciae (the connective tissues on the bottoms of your feet) much more completely than you can on a curb or stair. The reason? Instead of asking you to grip with your toes and balance your body out over empty space (or the next step down), the ProStretch supports your body fully — so the muscles opposing the ones you're stretching at the back of your leg can release fully, allowing for a more complete stretch. Athletes from many sports, including professional basketball, football, and hockey, use the ProStretch system; riders at the Nelson Pessoa Training Center in Brussels, Belgium, have become enthusiastic users — and at least one trainer we know reports she's found the device in her physical therapist's office, where it's used for rehabilitation and leg strengthening.

Our tester, a hunter/jumper trainer

whose students compete in East Coast amateur and children's competitions, had no problem learning to use ProStretch. Watching the videotape (which has no direct application to horses but does show how to use the unit correctly and safely), she found the instructions delivered a little quickly but thought the tape did a good job of showing different ways to use the unit and to make the most of time on it. She found the explanation of how to line up the body correctly over the feet particularly helpful — because doing so



closely mimics the hip-over-heel position riders strive for. Some of the video's lower-leg exercises, while not intended for riding, do a good job of showing how to strengthen the leg off the horse — which translates into a more secure leg and seat position *on* the horse.

After watching the videotape, our tester set up the ProStretch in her barn, positioning it near a wall that she could

support herself against when first stepping on. Once she sorted out her balance, though, she found the device easy to stay stable on with "no hands" — and found that it really gave her a feeling not only of properly extending her calf muscles, but of balancing over her heels as in correct two-point position. (She recommends wearing riding boots or heavy sneakers while working on the ProStretch because the device's ridged sole, which offers traction, can be tough on improperly shod feet.)

Our tester liked the ProStretch so much that she now encourages everyone in her barn to use it before every ride (and uses it herself every day). She believes that not only does it help riders stretch the backs of their legs much more completely before riding, and so lower their heels much more quickly once they're in the saddle, but it also lets them begin warming up on the ground — and so frees more of their riding time for lessons and schooling sessions. For her, spending two to ten pre-ride minutes on the ProStretch (just until her legs feel loosened) has almost eliminated the twenty minutes she used to spend during her first ride every day trying to get deep and around her horse.

Our tester's one caution: Children must learn that the ProStretch is not a toy — and that they can tip over backward if they don't use it correctly.

ProStretch®

Price: \$59.90 (suggested retail) plus \$7.00 shipping and handling. (Each unit comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee.)

Color: Royal blue or teal.

Ordering Information: Available in tack shops

For our "New Products" column, the editors of *Practical Horseman* select newly released horse-care items, tack, clothing, and training equipment that we judge to be of potential interest to readers. Each item then goes to a professional rider, trainer, or barn manager, who tests it for three months, following manufacturer's instructions (except where otherwise noted), and reports back to us on her or his experience. Only those items that our testers find of practical benefit are reviewed in this column. Neither *Practical Horseman* nor its testers receive compensation for product reviews.