Constructing a Mechanical Horse Walker

Series No. 3
A mechanical horse walker is a labour saving means of exercising horses in many yards. It is useful for preparing horses for sales, getting horses back into work after injury or illness, or simply for cooling horses down after hard work. The installation process is relatively straightforward once certain key issues, including planning permission, site and size are addressed.

Planning Permission:
Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Part 3 Exempted Development) mechanical walkers are considered as class nine facilities and are exempt from planning permission provided the following are adhered to:
• No such structure shall be used for any purpose other than the purpose of agriculture or forestry, but excluding the housing of animals or the storing of effluent
• Gross floor space not exceeding 300m² and not within a 100m of other such structures (store, barn, shed glass house, walker)
• Gross floor space of such structures together with any other such structures in class nine situated within the same farmyard complex or within 100m of that complex shall not exceed 900m² in gross floor space in aggregate
• No such structure shall be situated within 10m of a public road
• No such structure within 10m of a public road shall exceed 8m in height
• No such structure shall be situated within 100m of any house (other than the house of the person providing the structure) or other residential building or school, hospital, church or building used for public assembly, save with the consent in writing of the owner and, as may be appropriate, the occupier or person in charge thereof
• No unpainted metal sheeting shall be used for roofing or on the external finish of the structure

Site
Consider the following when choosing a suitable site for the mechanical horse walker:
• Proximity to the stables (for observation and loading)
• The levelness of the site (will influence site preparation cost)
• Access to water (if track surface requires it)
• Access to electricity
• Proximity to visual or noisy distractions
• Scope for further extension of the facilities within the yard complex

Recommended Specifications for New Walkers
The following parameters for installation are based on Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food specification S156. There are walkers on the market, which do not conform to these specifications and are not grant-aided.

Size
The size will be determined to an extent by the manufacturer and the number of divisions or horse places. It is desirable to have the diameter as large as possible within the bounds of the manufacturer’s recommendations. For grant purposes a minimum of four and a maximum of eight horse places may be installed.
Outer Track
- Minimum of 1.6m and a maximum of 2.4m wide
- Floor may be 100mm concrete on 150mm hardcore with a permanent covering of accepted material
- An all weather surface is acceptable
- A plain concrete floor is not acceptable
- Unroofed tracks must slope to the inner edge and drain from the central area to the outside

Walls
The following are accepted:
- Concrete blocks with reinforcing pillars
- Timber with galvanised steel frames
- Heavy duty galvanised mesh within a galvanised framework
Walls must be lined internally with a minimum of 6mm reinforced rubber sheets to 1.2 m minimum from the floor level. The outer wall must be 2.25m – 2.7m high and the inner wall 1.75m – 2m high. It is recommended that the outer walls be galvanised mesh in whole or part above 1.2m to allow for inspection of horses.

The Gate
Galvanised steel mesh gates or timber gates with a steel frame are acceptable. Gates must be 1.4m to 1.8m wide.

Electronic Control Panel
The electronic control panel must be situated adjacent to the gate and protected from the weather. One 100mm or two 50mm pipes must be installed well under the track to protect the power and control cables for the central machinery.

Roofs:
The roof is optional. If there is a roof it must be supported on steel stanchions set either within the outer wall or just outside it with steel rafters cantilevered from the stanchions. Rafters should extend about 1m beyond the line of the inner wall. Cladding sheets shall be positioned on purlins fixed to the rafters. The eaves height shall be a minimum of 3m from the floor level and the air space between the eaves and the walls shall be unobstructed. It is also accepted to construct a barn structure over the walker. In such cases the eaves shall be a minimum of 3m from the floor and there shall be a minimum of 1.5m unobstructed opening between the eave and the top of the wall. It is recommended that there are no walls in the barn structure.

Costs:
Costs of walkers vary considerably depending on size, number of partitions, inclusion or not of roofs, brakes, sprinklers and electric pushers.
An average four horse walker (minus site preparation and extras) may cost anything from €12,000 to over €20,000. Increasing the size to a six horse walker will not add significantly to the expense, providing the diameter is not greater than for the four horse model.

Please refer to www.agriculture.gov.ie under Farm Buildings for a full version of the specification S156 and S157.
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