

Evaluation of selected psychological traits of Polish Half-Bred mares depending on their housing system

Summary

The aim of this study was to evaluate the psychological characteristics of Polish Half-Bred mares depending on their housing system. The study was carried out on 24 mares housed in a stall system and 20 kept in a free-run system. Their behaviour was assessed when approached by and led by a stranger, when approached by a strange horse, when the bridle and riding equipment were put on, during cleaning and limb care, during feeding, and during a veterinary examination. Character, skittishness and tickling sensitivity were assessed as well. Each feature of behaviour was evaluated separately on a scale from A to D, where A was the maximum score and D the minimum score. The mares kept in the free-run system had generally better behaviour in terms of the psychological characteristics assessed than those housed in the stall system. The horses kept in the free-run system received significantly higher ($P \leq 0.01$) scores for behaviour while being walked and led by a stranger as compared to the horses in the stall system. The free-run system also had a more favourable effect on the behaviour of the horses while the bridle and riding equipment were put on and during cleaning, limb care, and examination by a veterinarian. These horses also had a better character and were less skittish. On the other hand, the mares housed in the stall system received significantly higher scores when approached by a strange horse, were calmer during feeding, and were less ticklish than those kept in the free-run system.

KEY WORDS: Polish Half-Bred horse, psychological characteristics, housing system