



Microchipping: A Permanent Bond Between You & Your Horse

On television, equine stars like Mr. Ed and Francis the Mule had no problem telling owners what they wanted. But in real life, horses and ponies can't talk, and in the devastating wake of disasters like the northern California wildfires, they can't tell us how to help them find their way home.

A microchip can speak for them.

"We've never had a disaster victim yet say they were glad that they had not chipped their horse," says Debi Metcalfe, founder of Stolen Horse International and NetPosse.com. "Providing identification is one of the most important responsibilities in today's horse care."

Equine microchipping took a stride forward after November 30, 2018, when show horses without a microchip could no longer compete in any hunter, hunter breeding, jumper, or hunter/jumper equitation classes not restricted by breed USEF-licensed competitions.

And in the Thoroughbred industry, the U.S. Jockey Club (USJC), the official breed registry for Thoroughbreds born in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico made the implant and reporting of a microchip compulsory for foals born in 2017 and beyond. Since then, the USJC has provided breeders and owners with more than 50,000 Datamars microchips, which are sent alongside DNA typing kits and Registration Applications.

Meanwhile, according to current industry statistics provided by the American Horse Council, the number of horses used recreationally is three times (3.1 million) that of horses shown (1.2 million) or raced (1.2 million). Many of these backyard horses are still at risk of being unidentified and vulnerable should they become homeless or separated from their owners.

At an equine microchipping clinic last June in Aurora, Colorado Horse Council executive director Bill Scebbi estimated that during a wildfire 600-700 horses can become displaced and end up at a fairground or temporary holding center because of evacuations.

In California, wildfires have exacted an even heavier toll. Thirty horses were lost in the Creek Fire in Angeles National Forest. Nearly 50 died at San Luis Rey Downs during San Diego County's Lilac Fire. In Thousand Oaks, horse barns were threatened while sandwiched between the Hill and Woolsey Fires.



“The most terrifying thought was that we couldn’t get all the horses out in time,” said Ride On therapeutic center’s Abigail Sietsema. Los Angeles Animal Care and Control’s safe centers ultimately housed nearly 600 horses, ponies, donkeys and other farm animals.

Many animals lucky enough to be rescued sustained mutilating burns and were suffering from smoke inhalation, dehydration and stress.

In such instances, a photograph or even the most loving in-person scrutiny may fail to help an owner recognize their own horse.

“Microchipping,” Scebbi says, “is one of the most important programs you can have with horse identity in the world. It makes it easier to reunite a horse with its owner.”

A national authority on reuniting lost and stolen horses with their owners, Metcalfe has spent the better part of two decades working with all forms of equine identification. “Consider a microchip as your serial number or VIN number for your horse,” Metcalfe says. “Why microchip? That answer is simple. You get a microchip to prove ownership in case of theft, disaster or civil situations, plus a multitude of unexpected events. Almost anyone can chip their horse since a horse is considered property. It is not legal in most states to insert a chip into another person’s horse unless you are a veterinarian or veterinary technician under a vet’s eye. Refer to the Veterinary Practice Act in your state for the current ruling.”

RFID (radio frequency identification) microchips like those by Datamars, are as compact as a grain of rice and easily implanted in a horse or pony’s nuchal ligament to provide permanent identification and a better chance, in an emergency, of returning to their owner.

But a microchip is only the first step in protection. Experts in the horse community also stress that a chip is only as good as the information attached to it. Vital to the success of equine identification is choosing a chip supported by a company or program that offers a registry and recovery service like Datamars’ www.petlink.net microchip registry.

Datamars, with more than 30 years experience as an animal identification authority, is a founding member of the American Horse Council (AHC) Microchip Look-Up program, which provides users with a free tool (HorseLookup.org) to search for organizations with registration information on horses implanted with a permanent sub-dermal microchip.

“The AHC www.horselookup.org,” says Steve Wilcox, Vice President, North American Pet I.D., at Datamars, “is the only true equine microchip lookup tool which works like the AAHA’s www.petmicrochiplookup.org.” Originally founded in 1933, the American

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Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) is the standard in veterinary excellence and biosecurity.

Ninety percent of horses rescued after Hurricane Maria that were found to be microchipped were able to be placed back with their owners, says Cliff Williamson, AHC Director of Health & Regulatory Affairs. “Part of owning horses responsibly is ensuring that every horse has a method of identification that is traceable.”

An easy search system is vital when owners are stressed with concern for a lost or missing animal. Using www.horselookup.org is as simple as typing in a chip number and pulling up a list of organizations housing information about that microchip.

The AHC program goes a step further by offering a Safety Net program where owners and breeders can permanently affix their name to a horse’s registration. If a horse is ever be in need of a new home, SafetyNet assures that someone from its past is willing to stay an advocate for them in the future.

In her October 2016 article, *The New Reality: Microchipping Horses*, for TheHorse.com, equine veterinarian Elizabeth Barrett, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVS, said, “Keeping track of points and wins helps keep horse sport fair, but microchips help with much more than that. They are a way veterinarians can protect themselves during pre-purchase examinations to ensure they are doing the exam on the correct horse. Breeding sheds can use chips to verify the correct mare is bred to the correct stallion. Microchips solve disputes over ownership (if records are up to date) and identify horses that have been stolen, abused or have fallen on hard times.

“The possibilities are endless for a tool that allows people to distinguish between horses that may otherwise – except for a whorl pattern -- look identical.”

By: L.A. Sokolowski