

# We Want A “Tough” Turnout

*JT International's Tough-1 answers the call, followed close behind by the Ice Turtle Turnout from Paint Rock Designs.*

We're so much luckier than horsemen from a couple of generations ago. They had to deal with heavy turnout blankets that caused horses to sweat if the temperature went up just a few degrees and easily became water-logged in rain or snow and very heavy.

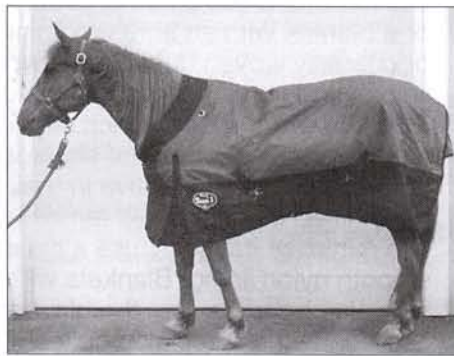
Today's blankets are a delight in comparison. They're easy to lift, water-resistant and breathable, so there's no need to rush to the barn to get the blanket off when the sun comes out.

## SIZING

Blanket sizes vary by style, cut and manufacturer. Plus, there could be a slight but significant difference among manufacturers in how you're told to measure. Generally, you measure for a blanket from the center of chest to around the widest part of horse to tail.

The chest should close completely with some overlap of fabric to keep drafts out. Look for soft straps that buckle easily and have keepers. Many blankets now have Velcro at the chest area to keep things snug and make working the fastenings easier, a definite plus.

Horizontal straps and buckles are most common. Some, like the Union Hill Warlock, have a snap and buckle that give you adjustability and quick ease, which is great if you have a lot of horses to dress and undress.



**The Tough-1 blanket gave us everything we needed at a nice price.**

A few have straps that cross diagonally, which allow the horse more freedom to lower his head. Be careful, though. We found the cross snaps on the JPC Stretch Manager may not be a good choice for young or busy minded horses. A test horse playing with them hooked them in her mouth like a bit and could not get free.

## NECK FIT

Horses vary a great deal in neck and shoulder conformation. Many blankets offer a Velcro neck adjustment. While this wasn't perfect, we found it did help reduce gaps.

The elastic neck of the Turtleneck is dandy, but it's only available for higher necked horses. It'll work well on Arabs, Morgans and other horses with similar conformation. Schneiders Saddlery's Stormshield Vetek has a

V insert at the withers that fit higher-withered horses well.

Blankets labeled as a “Euro fit” are cut higher at the neck and hang longer on the body, usually with no back seam or hip darts. This increases overall coverage and uses fewer seams. We've found stitched areas are the first to allow water to seep in.

Almost all our test blankets had shoulder gussets, which is great, since shoulders are often a site for rubs. Flank gussets serve little purpose to us.

## SURCINGLE

The surcingle, whether cross-straps or bellyband style, should be comfortably snug, not girth tight or draping loose. We like a bit of elastic in the surcingle, like on the Union Hill Warlock, to aid in comfort and fit.

Most blankets had T hooks on the surcingle straps, and some had added an O ring to help keep the hook secure. The rubber ones, such as the ones on the Rescue blanket worked great, but the hard plastic on the Kodiak was a frustration in the cold.

Leg straps should be neither tight nor hanging loose. The horse has to be able to move freely without the straps rubbing him raw. Elastic ones can be adjusted shorter and hooked



**We think tail flaps are necessary for maximum warmth, but we want to be able to remove and wash them.**

## Consider This . . .

- Tight spots in blanket fit can end up as rub marks.
- Chests should fit securely with no gaps.
- Leg straps should include elastic and be replaceable.
- Tail flaps are best if they're removable for cleaning.

to the same side of the blanket. Plain straps work better looser and crossed to the opposite side or passed around each other before hooking to either side of the blanket.

A nice addition is a fleece or satiny tube to cover the leg strap, especially if it isn't elastic. For cleaning or layering, straps that are removable like Paint Rock Designs blanket are helpful (they even include extras).

For winter, we like a tail or storm flap, but it's even better when it is removable for easy cleaning or nicer weather. It's a dirty area.

Our trial was held in the Northeast, and winter through everything it had at our horses. Most of the blankets kept our horses comfortable in all but the pouring rain. Leakage in pouring rain varied from lower denier soaked through to leaks in stitched areas on higher denier covers. All the blankets in our trial were waterproof/water-resistant and breathable.

Note: A blanket marked "water-

## Blanket Rubs

Ugly bare spots from blanket rubs can appear on your horse seemingly overnight. Those bare spots, which usually occur on the shoulders of horses who wear blankets, can be caused by a dirty blanket, a blanket that is too large and constantly shifts, a blanket that is too small to allow shoulder movement or a blanket with an abrasive lining. Unlined canvas or coarsely woven duck, some woven wool blanket linings and some fleeces can sand the hair right off.

Horses with well-laid-back shoulders tend to have a more prominent point of shoulder and if these horses are also very active in their blankets, even a nylon-lined blanket could remove shoulder hair.

To minimize hair loss, use a clean blanket with smooth nylon lining. Blankets with shoulder gussets may also help. Be sure the blanket fits well in front and adjust the surcingle and leg straps tight enough to limit side-to-side slippage.

When a horse does get a blanket rub, try EQyss Mega-Tek Rebuilder (www.eqyss.com, 800-526-7649) to help hair grow back faster. We found it takes a tiny amount for each spot of hair loss.



**Mega-Tek Rebuilder helps grow hair.**

## Winter Turnout Blankets

✓ **Horse Journal Editor's Choice**  
**\$ Horse Journal Best Buy**

Company	Price	Our Comments
✓ Glover Five Star Elite Glover Equine Products Ltd. www.gloverequine.com 800-565-6646	\$254.95	Attached hood, heavyweight, 2400 denier outer, 340 gram insulation. A very pretty blanket. Insulated all the way down. Elastic leg straps. Gussets and hood. It kept our test horse warm, dry and comfortable. No shifting or rubbing. However, we'd like to see keepers of some type on the front buckles. Otherwise, a great blanket.
Tuff Rider 600D Stretch Manager Thermolined Turnout Blanket JPC Equestrian Inc. www.jpcequestrian.com 866-273-3243	\$169.95	600 denier, Ripstop stretch material. Thermolined. This blanket had diagonal chest straps elastic with snaps and velcro, elastic leg straps, removable tail flap. However, it ran a bit narrow in the chest area. No gussets, but they're not necessary as this blanket is made of a stretchy material. Nice blanket, but it didn't stand up as well to horse play as other blankets.
Tuff Rider 1200D Integrated Neck Thermolined Turnout Blanket JPC Equestrian Inc. www.jpcequestrian.com 866-273-3243	\$149.95	1200 denier with integrated neck. Thermolined. Velcro and keepers at the chest with buckles. Elastic leg straps and removable tail flap. The straps were easy to manipulate, but we wish the neck were a little roomier.
Tuff Rider 600D Plaid Turnout Blanket JPC Equestrian Inc. www.jpcequestrian.com 866-273-3243	\$109.95	600 denier Ripstop fabric with 280 gram insulation. Chest Velcro and keepers with buckles, straps pointed. Shoulder gussets. Elastic leg straps, removable tail flap. Straps soft and user friendly, stays in place well, but the chest strap failed (probably due to horse play).
Tuff Rider 600D Plaid Fleece Lined Turnout Sheet JPC Equestrian Inc. www.jpcequestrian.com 866-273-3243	\$109.95	600 denier. Fleece-lined buckle and Velcro front, elastic leg straps, removable storm flap, stays in place well. Nylon lining at shoulder area and across bottom to repel mud and shavings. Our test horses were pretty hard on this blanket.
✓\$ Rescue 600D WPB Medium Weight Turnout Blanket JPC Equestrian Inc. www.jpcequestrian.com 866-273-3243	\$99.95	600 denier. 150 grams insulation. A handsome blanket. Removable elastic leg straps. Velcro and buckle front with soft pointed straps. Elastic receivers for surcingles. Removable storm flap. Fit well with no shifting or rubbing and no leaks. A top choice for a medium-weight blanket at a great price.

## BLANKET BOX

<p>✓ Tough-1 Polar 1680D Waterproof Poly Turnout Blanket J T International www.jtidist.com 800-843-4363</p>	\$139.80	1680 denier. 500 gram insulation. No back seam. Fleece withers. Crossed surcingles with elastic ends. Adjustable leg straps with elastic. Double-bucket front and shoulder gussets. Sewn-in storm flap. No chest Velcro. Terrific fit with higher neck. Stays put on horse, silky inside, straps soft nylon, looks sharp, details all well-finished, snap each end of leg straps. Absolutely lovely blanket, stays put with no rubbing. Truly tough.
<p>Tough-1 Polar 600D Waterproof Poly Turnout Blanket JT International www.jtidist.com 800-843-4363</p>	\$103.80	600 denier. Ripstop polyester. 300 grams insulation. Fleece withers. Crossed surcingles with elastic. Adjustable leg straps with elastic. Terrific fit with higher neck stays put on horse, silky inside, straps are soft nylon, Looks terrific. Well finished. Snap each end of leg straps. Nice blanket, stays put with no rubbing. Some moisture got in the lower corner of chest panel and turned to ice between lavers.
<p>✓ Ice Turtle Turnout Paint Rock Designs www.turtleneckinfo.com 888-371-1519</p>	\$285	1680 ballistic nylon. 300 gram insulation. Stout Velcro and buckle front. Removable neck fleece, elastic turtleneck design that hugs the horse to prevent moisture or snow from getting in. Elastic surcingles with hooks on both sides, insulated to bottom. Spare straps and an ID plate. Elastic gussets. This blanket was 100% waterproof for us, even in the pouring rain. Seamless back. Detachable, replaceable straps. Storm flap sewn in. Warm, comfortable and durable. A top choice. Not designed for Quarter Horses.
<p>Kodiak Turnout Horse Loverz.Com www.horseloverz.com 877-804-7810</p>	\$109.95	600 denier Ripstop polyester. 210 gram insulation. Adjustable leg straps. Chest Velcro and buckles. No leaking. Stayed in place well. T strap ring was a bit too stiff. Leg straps were sewn in without elastic, and the liner was just a bit crinkly sounding.
<p>✓ Horseware Ireland Rambo Original www.horseware.com Contact your tack dealer</p>	\$250	1000 denier ballistic nylon. Nylon-lined. Experienced no rips or tears at all and repels water well. No shoulder gussets. Classic original neck design. Straight front closures. Crisscross surcingles. Choice of fill weights. Good choice.
<p>✓ Stormshield VTEK Marathon Bellyband Turnout Schneiders Saddlery www.sstack.com 800-365-1311</p>	\$164.95	1680 denier ballistic nylon. Euro V-free (a raised, shaped withers construction to eliminate rubbing). Neck extends up onto the horse's mane. Tekno-Dri lining. Teflon coating. Bellyband fastening or crisscross surcingle. Extended shoulder gussets. Drops deeply on sides. Attached tail cover. 210 gram nylon lining. Velcro and buckle front. Velcro neck adjustment. Leg straps have elastic and snap on each end. Didn't shift. Nice choice.
<p>✓ Stormshield VTEK Marathon Midweight Turnout Schneiders Saddlery www.sstack.com 800-365-1311</p>	\$164.95	1680 denier ballistic nylon. Euro V-free (a raised, shaped withers construction to eliminate rubbing). Neck extends up onto the horse's mane. Tekno-Dri lining. Teflon coating. 220 gram insulation. Velcro and buckle front. Velcro neck adjustment, elastic leg straps with snap each end. Elastic on T hook receivers. Fit like a glove, never shifted or rubbed. Very durable. A top pick.
<p>Stormshield Fitted New Briton Schneiders Saddlery www.sstack.com 800-365-1311</p>	\$109.95	1200 denier polyester. 220 gram insulation. Velcro storm flap. Neck adjustment Velcro. V-free fit at withers (a raised, shaped withers construction to eliminate rubbing). Elastic leg. Chest buckles with Velcro. Stayed in place well, but we wish the chest buckles had keepers. Extended gussets. Detachable tail flap.
<p>Stormshield Big Fella Superquilt Turnout Schneiders Saddlery www.sstack.com 800-365-1311</p>	\$129.95	1200 Ripstop denier. 220 gram insulation. Velcro and buckle front. Velcro neck adjustment (V-free fit at withers, a raised, shaped withers construction to eliminate rubbing). Elastic leg straps with snap each end. Elastic on T-hook receivers. Held up well to horseplay and kept the weather and water out. Neckline worked well on hefty draft cross, as the Big Fella design accommodates horses that need bigger, broader shoulders and deeper sides. Neck extends up onto mane. Extended gussets. Teflon coating exterior. Crisscross surcingle.
<p>✓ Weatherbeeta Orican Freestyle Weatherbeeta www.weatherbeeta.com 877-927-4337</p>	\$130	1200 denier. High necked, lightweight. Waterproof, with no leaks at all. Buckles and Velcro chest. T-hook surcingles with slide rings, elastic leg straps. We'd like to see higher gussets. Polymesh lining. Combination web/elastic adjustable/removable leg straps and twin chest straps. Great choice.
<p>Warlock Blankets Union Hill Corp. www.uhcorp.com 732-786-9422</p>	\$99.99	600 denier. 200 gram insulation. Front buckles with snap on opposite side for quick hook-up is a nice touch. Elastic leg straps, elastic on surcingle receiver. Didn't rub or slip, but other blankets proved more durable for turnout.
<p>✓ Medium Weight Turnout Valley Vet Supply www.valleyvet.com 800-419-9524</p>	\$149.95	600 denier. 240 gram insulation. Cool Wick lining. Handsome blanket. Elastic detachable leg straps. Buckle and Velcro chest closure. Shoulder gusset. Fleece at withers. Detachable tail flap. Crisscross surcingles. Stayed in place well, although the leg straps were stiff.
<p>Lightweight Turnout Blanket Valley Vet Supply www.valleyvet.com 800-419-9524</p>	\$99.95	600 denier. 340 grams insulation. Handsome blanket. Lower nylon portion outer helps prevent buildup of dirt and shavings on blanket ends. Crisscross surcingles. Nylon chest. Leg straps were a bit stiff, but the blanket stayed in place well.

## When To Blanket

The decision on when to blanket and when not to blanket is a tough one. Without question, when possible, we forgo blanketing.

A horse who has never been blanketed probably won't need to be, unless you decide to clip him. Thick coats will insulate horses from the cold (wind and wet are separate issues, so shelter must be provided in these conditions). Of course, in warm weather, no blanket is always an option.

Sometimes it does become necessary to use a blanket on your horse, whether due to the environment or being body clipped in cold weather or due to a horrible fly season in the summer or to help keep them clean during a show. To help you make the decision on when to use which type of blanket, we've compiled basic guidelines for choosing what is right for your horse and climate. Remember, common sense prevails. If your horse is shivering in the cold, he probably needs a heavier—or double—blanket, regardless of our suggestions. And if he's sweating under his stable sheet, remove it. Like people, horses have individual tolerances for the environment.

### Blanketing Tips:

- A blanketed horse should always be clean and dry.
- Temperatures listed don't take wind into consideration (think wind-chill temperatures).
  - During fly season, substitute fly sheets whenever possible, choosing a durable one for turnout.
  - During the rainy season, substitute a waterproof/breathable rain sheet for the turnout sheet.
  - During snow season, substitute a waterproof/breathable winter turnout blanket for the turnout blanket.

Temperature	Stabled and Clipped	Turnout (no clip)
90°F and above	Nothing	Nothing
80° F	Nothing or fly sheet	Turnout fly sheet, light turnout sheet, or nothing
70° F	Stable sheet, fly sheet or nothing	Turnout sheet, fly sheet or nothing
60° F	Stable sheet, fly sheet	Turnout sheet, fly sheet or nothing
50° F	Stable sheet or lightweight blanket	Turnout sheet or nothing
40° F	Midweight blanket	Lightweight blanket, turnout sheet or nothing
30° F	Midweight blanket	Lightweight blanket, turnout sheet or nothing
20° F	Heavyweight blanket	Lightweight blanket or turnout or nothing
10° F	Heavyweight blanket and hood	Midweight or heavyweight turnout blanket or nothing
0° F	Heavyweight blanket and hood	Heavyweight or midweight blanket or nothing
-10° F and below	Heavyweight or double blanket and hood	Heavyweight turnout blanket and hood

proof" means that no water is supposed to be able to penetrate the material. A water-resistant blanket will "resist" most light showers and snow storms but leakage may occur with heavier moisture.

The more grams of insulation, the warmer the blanket. Note that most blankets are not filled all the way down the sides, although the Turtleneck is. The Brookside offers a 340-gram fleece back liner instead of polyfill on a lighter turnout.

A few, like the Glover Five Star Elite, have an attached neck cover, added warmth and a great way to keep wetness from running down and in around the shoulders. One test horse loved it, but two others were bothered by being so enclosed.

"Breathable" is the big word in blankets for good reason. As the temperatures yo-yoed as much as 30 degrees, the horses stayed comfortable with no sign of sweating. Even the heavyweight blankets at above-freezing temperatures showed only minimal sweat spots starting to develop.

Your horse's lifestyle is an important determining factor in blanket selection. If he spends most of his time in a stall he isn't likely to need more than a medium-weight winter blanket unless he's kept clipped. A pasture horse with a run-in shed may be happier with a midweight, unless you are in a particularly frigid area (then you'll reach for JT International's 500 gram insulation). Naturally, keep in mind the horse's age and condition, as these factors will limit his ability to stay cozy then opt for a warmer blanket.

Another consideration is your horse's companions. Does he romp with playful buddies? Horse teeth can be tough on a blanket, and higher denier will take the abuse better. The Rambo blanket and the Brookside are among those that we think will hold up best in rough crowds.

Another good choice for rougher environments is the Stormshield VTEK Marathon, which survived a horse who thought it was his magic suit of armor for pushing through fences.

Consider the cost of cleaning and repair in comparison to buying a new blanket each year. If your horse should have been named "El Destructor" you might be ahead of the game



We like the addition of fleece at the withers.

to get a cheaper blanket and replace it each year rather than an expensive one you want to last for years.

### BOTTOM LINE

Horse teeth can be tough on a blanket, and we found that the toughest exteriors were on the Tough-1 Polar 1680 denier, the Brookside Medium Weight Turnout and Stormshield VTEK Marathon, which survived a horse who thought it was a suit of armor for pushing through fences.

For a lightweight waterproof choice, we found the Weatherbeeta Orion Freestyle a great choice.

For overall top pick, we had three contenders. The Ice Turtle Turnout from Paint Rock Designs is an incredible blanket, and we can't imagine what could be improved, although Quarter Horse owners are out of luck on this one. For these horses (and others, of course), we like the Glover Five Star Elite. Both these blankets, however, are over \$250 each and won't fit in some budgets.

With that in mind, we give the No. 1 nod to the JT International Tough-1 Polar 1680. At \$139.80, we found a tough, nicely fitting, warm blanket that kept our horses dry.

Our Best Buy blanket choice is the \$99.95 JPC Equestrian Rescue blanket. It's a medium-weight blanket that fits nicely without leaks and stays put.

*Horse Journal staff report.* [E]



Our testers really liked adjustable necklines, which helped them reduce gaps.

## Blanketing Safety

*Dealing with these large, heavy pieces of fabric can take practice.*

**P**ulling blankets on and off is one of those things we do without much thought, until a horse or human gets hurt. If a horse spooks with the blanket half off, he'll likely kick out. He can get tangled in ties or take off dragging the blanket. A leg can get hung up or the human can get caught in the crossfire.

**Rule of Thumb:** *Work front to back when putting blankets on, and work back to front when taking them off.* You're less likely to place yourself or your horse in an unsafe position and also less likely to forget any straps, buckles or snaps, thus saving you time and trouble.

Most of us have a collection of blankets of different makes and models, with a wide variety of straps and buckles and snaps. If you're using three layers (stable sheet, covered by a blanket and topped by a turnout sheet or a PVC-type fly sheet for added durability), you could have as many as 24 buckles and snaps to do/undo per horse, and it's very easy to forget a couple.

Make sure the surcingle(s) doesn't droop. If your bottom layers have removable leg straps, then take them off. The leg straps on the top layer will hold everything in place, and that's fewer straps to fuss about or for the horse to get caught in.

Of course, if you aren't totally familiar with the horse in the stall you should tie it first before changing blankets, and you should never change blankets in the pasture without a halter and lead rope. If you don't know the horse, or the horse tends to be spooky, fold the blanket before laying it on his back.

If you plan to toss a cooler behind the saddle while walking, remove the tail strap first so it doesn't get caught.

For stability, we like to fasten leg straps on the same side rather than to opposite sides: Fasten the offside strap around the off hind at both ends, then run the nearside strap thru the offside strap before snapping it back to the nearside rear ring.

Again, for stability, we like closed-front blankets, especially if you're mostly changing blankets in the stall. Closed-front blankets, unfortunately, are less convenient when the horse is on a lead or is tied, but if he's reliable closed-front blankets are your best bet.

### STATIC ELECTRICITY

If there's a cold snap or snow and the humidity drops, then the likelihood for static electricity goes up. You don't want to be near the rear of the horse if a sudden static snap sends him flying backwards. Hence, you especially want to follow our rule of thumb, and unfasten all leg straps before lifting the blankets.

If you use a static-prevention product, lay the blanket flat on the ground first. Don't spray it while the blanket is on the horse and most especially don't lift up layers of blanket/sheets on the horse and spray between them. This can set off a static charge. You can even use Show Sheen on the horse to reduce static but, again, remove all blankets before spraying the horse.