

ALLAY'S JOURNEY THE FIRST TWELVE MONTHS

BY DR. NERIDA MCGILCHRIST



INTRODUCTION

Here we are, at the 16th instalment of Queensland Off-The-Track's Nutrition Education series... we have covered a lot; physiology, gut health, feeding programs for specific situations, preventing diseases and dealing with the extremes of the Queensland climate! It's a lot of information, but hopefully it will serve as a beautiful resource for you, our beautiful OTT owners, to keep coming back to over the years to give the best of care, and have some wonderful adventures with your brilliant OTTs.

To end the series, we wanted to show you that following the process described in 'Video 2 - The First 12 Months' really does work. And to be honest, I wanted to fact check my own information in the most vulnerable - and the BEST - possible way. And that was, to go through the process of taking a horse off the track and bringing it through its first 12 months ourselves (ahem like the best excuse ever to get a new horse... 'I need it for work' 🤔😅😂)... so... we got an OTT! Meet Allay! 🥰💜💖

The 'Allay - The First 12 months' video tells her story visually. Her transformation from proper racehorse, to teenager's showjumper is beautiful. She is a special girl, as all of our OTTs are.

What you will find here in this ebook is my 'Allay Journal', kept sporadically over her first 12 months to capture her journey and details about her feeding. You will see me and feel the emotions as I ride the journey of taking a thoroughbred off the track and trusting her with my teenage daughter, Tamaya.

My hope is that you can use this journal to learn a little bit more about feeding OTTs and also to discover that even for me, as a professional equine nutritionist, I was questioning myself at times and hoping I was 'right' with the advice I had given in Video 2! BUT, spoiler alert, it has all worked beautifully, her gut rehabilitated and we have a calm, content, happy, healthy OTT who will already stand calmly at events, resting her hind leg and snoozing! I am going to call that mission accomplished!

Enjoy Allay's journey! 💖💖



Nerida

29/11/2024

DAY 1

Arriving home.

Having been connected with Allay's owners/trainer via a friend, we travelled to Scone, NSW (which is conveniently only 90 minutes from home), to meet Allay and make sure we were all happy that we were the right fit for her, and her for us and to (hopefully) pick her up and bring her home. Allay was bred, owned and raced by the Cavanough family, and was a stable favourite and much loved by the family. They didn't want to sell her, but they also didn't necessarily want or need to breed from her. So she had been just hanging out with their broodmare band for a few months since retiring from racing after her last race on August 8th 2024 while they worked out what to do with her.

After meeting her, thinking holy heck she is huge (measuring close to 17 hh), but seeing Tamaya ride her for the first time after she was just pulled out of the paddock, and how quiet she was, we knew she was going to be a fit for us, and the Cavanough's were happy too, so we loaded her on our float and drove carefully home. Note here to say there was a fair bit of agitated tail swishing while she was being ridden... ulcers maybe?

For feed, I really just wanted her to eat... we made plenty of lucerne hay available, she had access to plenty of pasture and I gave her a small feed, starting to introduce the balancer pellet and chaff. She was on a grain-based hard feed so I'm not concerned with introducing the balancer from Day 1. 😊



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DAY 2

Scrubbed and Wormed.

Allay arrived with some skin off from being in a broodmare band and also with a bit of rain scald, so we wormed her and washed her in iodine scrub for her skin. Worming is that tricky balance between not introducing a worm burden onto our property (potentially with resistance issues) and being wary of stacking stressors on the gut from moving and worming. I decided the worming and its impact on the gut was the lesser of two evils, when resistant worms were a possibility, so she was wormed today.

She is very calm and already seems very settled. She is grazing ok, compared to our other horses, though she moves a lot and doesn't spend nearly as much time with her head down grazing. But she is resting calmly for periods of time, so, thankfully, I don't see any worrying behaviour. She is fidgety with her feed too, will eat a few mouthfuls, then go for a walk, then eat a few more. Not in an anxious way, just in a 'can't stand still' way.



DAY 3

Move to the big pasture and fighting my desire to FEED her.

The paddock where we kept Allay for the first few days doesn't have much morning shade and the pasture in there isn't great at this time of year, as all the winter grasses have lain over and been rained on multiple times... so, out to the big pasture! 30 acres of freedom!

With our old horse Breeze as a steady guide, Allay spent a good hour walking, with no more than a few nibbles of grass, just exploring her new surrounds. One very short moment of tail in the air trot/canter and one snort, but that was about it luckily, as there are lots of trees in the paddock that I'd prefer she learns to navigate slowly!

She did lie down for a roll and a big rub on the ground, so I figure that's a good sign she feels relatively happy and safe!

It struck me as I watched her though, that thoroughbreds are somewhat unique in their temperament.

They move. A LOT!

And their interest in food is much less. I'm used to my other horses (who now all look like ponies next to 16.3 hh Allay 😊) going into a new environment and just eating. And I'm used to them spending a lot more time standing, grazing slowly or sleeping than moving.

So it makes sense that OTTs are often hard to keep weight on.

Their energy expenditure is high because they move so much, and their energy intake is lower because they devote less time to eating.

The biggest thing I am noticing for me, on an emotional level, is the desire to FEED HER. I'm watching her walk and not eat, worrying about her losing weight... and I know, without a doubt that I could feed her up and make her look amazing.

BUT I know that feeding her lots now will have multiple knock-on effects, including:

01/12/2024

1. She won't be as hungry and therefore not as driven to go and graze. The one skill I want this horse to remember, is that she has to eat pasture! And the best way to do that, at this point, is to let her hunger drive her to graze.
2. She will be full of energy and even more prone to moving more than she needs to. At this point we really want her to just settle. If I fill her full of feed now to keep her looking OK, it will just increase her energy levels and make it harder for her to settle into her new life.
3. It will make it harder/slower for her hindgut to transition back to being a diverse, fibre-fermenting environment. If I make her rely on fibre now, her gut microbes have got no choice but to revert to a fibre-fermenting environment, and they will do it much faster than if she stayed on a higher energy, grain-based feed for the sake of weight maintenance at the moment.

So while I don't want her to lose weight as such, I am willing to let her lose some condition at this point for the long-term good.

She is on Month 1, Diet Option 2 from the Queensland Off-The-Track's 'Feed Your Off The Track' eBook:

Current diet - month 1

1 kg/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's Premium 250)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil
500 g/day	Lucerne chaff
4 kg/day	Lucerne hay
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

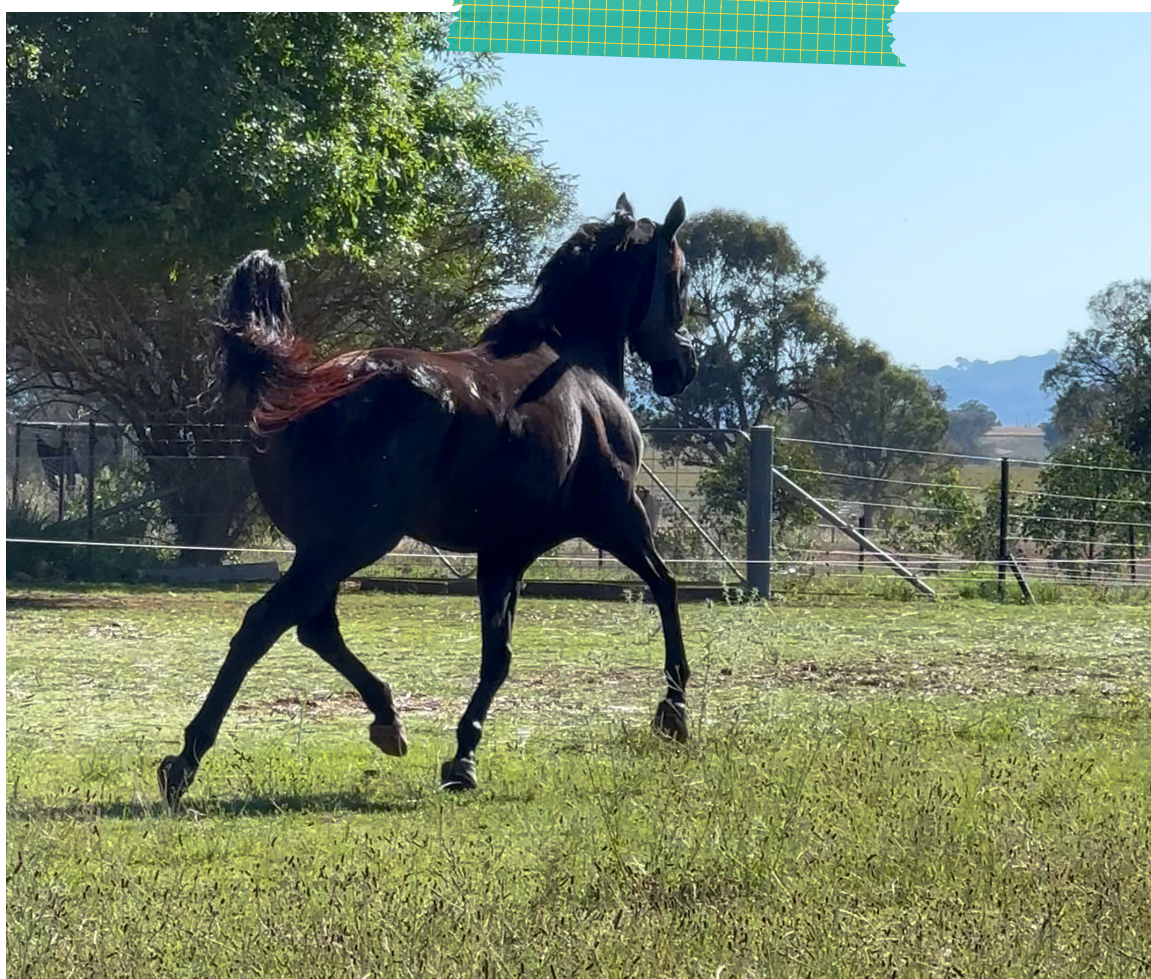
01/12/2024

DAY 3 (CONT...)

This diet will keep her healthy, her hooves fed, her immune system supported and provide some calories and high-quality protein, so we will see... I expect some improvement in her skin and coat and I'm really hoping, with the lucerne and the lovely pasture she now has access to, she will only drop a tiny bit of condition.

BUT, man it's tough not to feed her more 😅! It's me fighting me on this one.

As I watch her out in the pasture now though, nose on the ground grazing beside dear old Breeze who is worth her weight in gold with guiding youngsters, I do know, that this is the way to go for her long-term health, happiness, temperament and ability to thrive on a forage-based diet! 💕



DAY 17

We love Allay!

OMG I love off-the-tracks... in the short space of 17 days this big girl has our hearts.

She is sweet, quirky, smart and just a pleasure to do anything with, comes straight up to be caught, stands patiently as we treat the bit of rain scald she still has and entertains us with her quirks (drinking straight from the hose being one of them, no kidding, I've never seen a horse do this before, as in actually drink from the hose! Very funny to watch and listen to as she slurps!).

We are slowly working our way through our health checklist. Wormed on arrival and then a FEC (faecal egg count) done to confirm a zero egg count. Will egg count again in the coming months... timing depending on what our weather decides to do, very hot and dry currently, which, looking on the bright side, is great for controlling worm burdens!

(Note: She has been regularly FEC tested over the 12 months and always returned a count of zero!)

We are waiting to see when we can schedule a gastroscope to check for ulcers, but it is looking like our earliest opportunity may be February at this stage. Her appetite is good though, and she doesn't show any outward signs of ulceration, so for now I'm not too worried about any severe ulceration.

(Note: There wasn't an opportunity to scope her locally and I decided without any actual symptoms of ulceration, it wasn't worth putting her through the process just to capture video footage, so she wasn't scoped in the end).

She also had a hoof abscess blow out at her coronet band a week ago. She is tough as nails evidently, as she showed no signs of lameness, then even when it ruptured (not sure if that is the correct terminology!) she was still only mildly lame at the walk. A few days of poulticing and it appears to be coming good (fingers crossed!).

Next step will be a dental health check!

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DAY 17 (CONT...)

On the nutrition front though I'm still struggling, emotionally!! Half of my inner nutritionist wants to feed this horse because I know I could have her looking amazing in no time. The other half KNOWS I need to just sit tight and let her figure out the grazing thing! And let her gut re-establish itself with the microbes that will give her a lifetime of fibre fermenting prowess (saving me a small fortune in feed over her lifetime!). (See her gut microbiome results, page 26. I want to say mission accomplished again!) 😊

So far, two weeks in and she has maybe lost a little bit of topline, but seems to be holding her condition. There are days when I feel like I can see her ribs more and I panic... a nutritionist's panic, thinking "oh dear have I given you all the right advice in saying just lots of lucerne hay and good quality pasture or grassy hay and a balancer pellet and oil for the first month"!

I will make a small confession here that, as our pasture rapidly drops in quality with hot, dry weather, I have introduced 2 cups per day of Pryde's EasiFibre (lupin hulls and lucerne meal) into her daily feed and added lucerne pellets as well as mixed chaff. I will allow myself that as small compensation for low quality grass pasture... and will just watch this space as our hot, dry summer starts to hit hard over the next few weeks to see if I will increase this some more.

Thinking about it, while trying to follow my own advice from Video 2, it is always important to remember that every feeding plan needs to be adjusted to handle whatever environmental conditions or other variables are thrown at it.

16/12/2024

For now though I will hold her at her current diet:

Current Diet (poor pasture)

1 kg/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's Premium 250 pellet)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
500 g/day	Lucerne pellet (instead of lucerne chaff)
300 g/day	Fibre pellet (Pryde's EasiFibre)
400 g/day	Triple chaff mix (another adjustment, the lucerne chaff available at the time was such poor quality I opted for this and the lucerne pellets instead)
4 - 5 kg/day	Lucerne hay
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

If the pasture dries off even more I may start to introduce more alternate fibres before the 1 month... I'll see if I can hold out on my urge to feed her!

In saying that though, the benefits to her behaviour of keeping her just on forage/fibres are certainly noticeable. She is calm and steady which we need her to be as she settles in and learns to navigate her new surrounds, and as Tamaya gets to know her, and starts to do tiny little bits of groundwork with her.

29/12/2024

1 MONTH

Things are looking good!

We are a month in and, I am very happy to report that Allay is doing very well!

Rain scald has gone, hoof abscess has resolved and, very relieving for me is she has held her condition and maybe even gained a tiny bit of condition over the course of this first month, just on balancer pellet, the chaff/lucerne pellet combo, lupin hulls, a little oil and plenty of lucerne and pasture (which is now completely brown).

Her coat is shiny but not amazing, I am guessing largely owing to the fact she is dark in colour and it has been HOT! Most evenings she has remnants of salt all over from her day's sweat... and as we know, sweat plus sun tend to do a number on the coats of darker horses in summer! So for now, I'm not going to worry too much about how her coat looks and will reassess in Autumn when it should be looking stunning.



29/12/2024

1 MONTH (CONT...)

Most gratifying perhaps is the change in her behaviour since she arrived. I wrote in the first few days about her spending a lot of time moving and not so much time grazing. This has changed rather dramatically, and she now has her head down pretty much every time I see her, grazing calmly alongside old Breezey, who has yet again proved how valuable the old members of a herd are as a calming influence on the youngsters!

It is also valuable justification, just for myself, to know that my strategy of keeping her supplementary feed minimal to encourage her to graze as much as possible, has worked. I was nervous! And it took a fair chunk of willpower to not follow what I instinctively wanted to do and feed her lots. BUT sitting here at the one-month point with a big and recently off the track thoroughbred who has managed to hold her weight with minimal supplementary feed, on poor quality pasture, is a satisfying feeling! 💖

Where to from here?

I took a manure sample for microbiome analysis so we can see the shift from day one to one month (ooo and it's so exciting, see results, page 26). We will now start to introduce additional fibre variety into her diet with the aim of building a hindgut environment that is resilient and very efficient at digesting fibre.

She has Stance Hemp Hulls and Hearts added at 50 g per day, which we will increase to 100 g/day over the next 7 days.

Then I will add a small amount of Pryde's LupinPak. It isn't an ingredient I suggested for months 2 to 6 in the video series. However, I can't get the EasiFibre (lupin hulls) at the moment and our pasture has completely dried off, which means its protein content will have dropped significantly. So adding a small amount of lupin (500 g/day) will keep her protein intake up while still letting her utilise the most economical fibre we have in the pasture.

After this, I think I will add sugarbeet pulp. I love the stuff as an alternate fibre and it is completely different to any fibre she already has in her diet.

So her diet, in three weeks' time will look like this:

Current diet - fibre diversity

1 kg/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's Premium 250 pellet)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
500 g/day	Lucerne pellet (Johnson's Alfalfa Plus)
100 g/day	Hemp (Stance Hemp Hulls & Hearts)
250 g/day	Sugarbeet Pulp
500 g/day	Lupins (Pryde's LupinPak)
250 g/day	Mixed chaff
4 kg/day	Lucerne hay
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

I don't love the complexity of this diet, but for the purpose of this exercise, it is worth the effort as I do think it is going to create a brilliant outcome with an OTT who maintains weight well on a largely forage-based diet for the rest of her lifetime!

Let's see if I am right... on with the journey! What fun! 🥳 (P.S. I was right 😊)

Oh, and Tamaya hasn't ridden her yet (aside from on the day we picked her up) but we will get her teeth done (our vet dentist was so busy before Christmas we didn't want to add to his pile so have left it until the New year) and then Tamaya will start doing some riding, following Warwick Schillers' principles as much as we can 🥳🥳

16/01/2025

DAY 48

A girl's gotta eat!

I'm laughing as I watch 1 quarter horse, 2 Australian stock horses, 2 paints and one pony, all notorious easy keepers, sleeping in the shade during the late afternoon heat and one Allay, OTT TB... out grazing!!

She has definitely been taught the lesson of "whenever there is food, you should eat" by the other horses... good job herd!! 😂 Noticeable difference from the first week when she seemed to move a lot more than she ate!

She's a solid BCS of 5 now too, definitely some cover over those ribs and they're less and less prominent as she moves.



17/01/2025

DAY 49

First Ride!!

We are 7 weeks in and with miss Allay's temperament being as lovely as it is, Tamaya decided she would have her first ride on Allay. And Allay took it all in her beautiful, big stride! She is truly a sweet girl.

Doing nothing more than some ridden connection work with her, Tamaya walked and trotted largely on a loose rein, with my nieces scooting around on ponies. When they had done enough, Tamaya and Allay stood in the middle of the mayhem and Allay just went to sleep with one hind leg rested. Couldn't ask for much more than that for a first (well, second) ride.

Happily, there was none of the agitated tail swishing we saw on the first ride (which I figure now was from the rain scald), so my suspicion of ulcers has all but gone. I'd still like to see inside that stomach though when there is a local opportunity to do so!

Good job Tamaya and Allay - you look gorgeous together! 🥰

25/01/2025

DAY 57

First outing!!

I listen to and watch a lot of Warwick Schiller and one of his principles is: only change one thing at a time. My memory is that one thing he does to stay true to this principle is take horses out to a place where there is no pressure on them to be ridden or perform until they are completely comfortable in the new environments, before they are ridden in those environments.

So, we took Allay to a small showjumping practice day! And... it was interesting!

She is far more racehorse when out and about than she is at home. If she was close by Popcorn, Tamaya's other little mare (tiny if she is standing next to Allay 🤔), then Allay was as relaxed as you like. If Popcorn went away, she turned into a racehorse, on her toes, jogging and a bit more anxious!

But, with some cavalettis to help, I managed to keep her feet moving and her mind a bit focused, and all in all, it was a really positive experience for her. She travels beautifully!

Next we might take her out for a day nowhere in particular, just a float ride, an in-hand mosey somewhere quiet and a ride home... just because!



29/01/2025

2 MONTHS

Hooray for better pasture!

Allay is perfect in every way for us... EXCEPT, I would have loved to have had her straight off the track to really experience the coming down off racing. Nonetheless, she was still on grain based hard feed when we picked her up and she did teeter on weight for a while, giving me plenty to worry about with her condition! (And, when I did finally get to see her gut microbiome, we can definitely see the change from grain based to forage and fibre based diet! Yay!! 🌟)

I'm really happy to say though at 2 months she is doing amazingly well! We had rain, which helped a lot as our pastures have picked up in quality again with plenty of green, high quality pasture coming through,

Her diet now is:

Current diet

1 kg/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's Premium 250 pellet)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
500 g/day	Lucerne chaff
100 g/day	Hemp (Stance Hemp Hulls & Hearts)
100 g/day	Lupins (Pryde's EasiFibre)
100 g/day	Fibre pellet (Pryde's LupinPak)
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

Because the pasture picked up in quality so much I haven't yet added the sugarbeet pulp!

And she is gaining weight slowly, so much so that I actually don't want any additional weight on her now! If the universe has seen fit to send me an easy keeper thoroughbred who I have to keep in our fatties track paddock, I am going to be so disappointed... finally I thought we had a horse I could actually feed! 😂

She is now barefoot and maybe still a tiny bit tender but this is something we will give some time and work on with our amazing barefoot trimmer, Lucy Hicks, as ideally we would love to keep her barefoot. Her hooves are in great shape, so we haven't used and at this stage I don't feel the need to use a hoof supplement, I just want the balanced diet to do the work for now.

(And update, she has remained 100% barefoot and sound. We do have to be careful not to trot her on the gravel roads, but otherwise she happily walks them and Lucy is happy with the condition of her hooves!)

Her coat is still looking pretty average 😞... but she is an exceptionally heavy sweater, indicated by the crust of salt that is almost constantly on her coat, and with that and the summer sun, I suspect most of what her coat is showing is sunbleaching. I am contemplating adding some canola oil into her diet, as sometimes I find horses on largely forage based diets NEED the omega 6 and it picks their coats up faster. I'll keep the flax oil in there as I love that stuff and know Omega 3 is so important, but will also try a little canola oil (maybe another 60 ml/day).

And most importantly, her temperament is lovely! So calm in the paddock (thank you again to our dear old Breeze for showing her how to be chillaxed!) and an absolute pleasure to handle and work with. She's also slowly learning to stop threatening poor little Spotty pony, over the fence, with near certain death (based on how far she has her ears pinned) at feed time! A few little boundaries laid down there around how it's simply not polite to treat your herd members like this and she now mostly just patiently waits for her feed.

Next feed change (beyond the canola oil) will be adding a small amount of sugarbeet pulp to her diet for another fibre source/more fibre variety. Curious on what her microbiome is doing but I'll wait until we have a sample at 5 months and send samples off to EquiGI for analysis!



DAY 95

Teeth!

Finally managed to get our wonderful vet Dr Doug out to get this girl's teeth done!

She is such a relaxed horse, stood there next to the truck as the crush was lowered, wanting to move towards it rather than run away and then she was making me laugh because she WANTED to go into the crush!

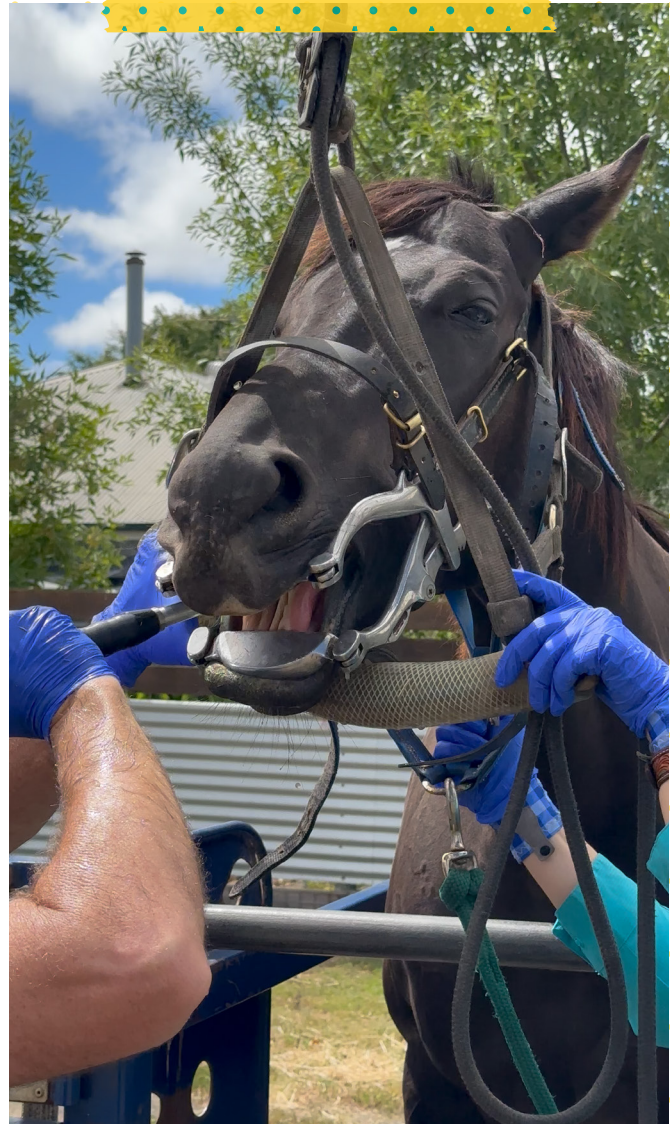
A little sedation and Doug was able to get a really good look in her mouth!

They hadn't been done in a while and definitely needed some attention. Nothing dramatic, just the usual sharp edges a horse will get that were lacerating her cheeks.

All done and she should feel much more comfortable now! And be able to eat without pain!!

(Note: Dr Doug recommended we have her done again in 6 months which we have also had done. Her teeth are looking good and she will slot in with the rest of our herd now when they have their annual teeth checkup in early 2026 💕)

04/03/2025



29/03/2025

4 MONTHS

Time flies

I just sat down to write this and got a surprise when I worked out Allay has only been here for just over 4 months! Given the way she has settled down as one of the crowd, it feels like she has been here a lot longer.

Allay is doing splendidly! In fact as I write this I am laughing again as all the other horses are standing around in the shade having a little rest and she is still out grazing!

Her weight is beautiful, she must be condition score 5.5 now and I think she is even starting to round out a bit more.

She is calm and relaxed and Tamaya has been able to just go and jump on her and go for a ride, even after weeks of not being ridden. She is so quiet. Tamaya just keeps her on a long relaxed rein most of the time.

Feed wise, the biggest change is... I have stopped panicking about her weight.

She has had a few changes to her feed in the last month as we weren't able to get the original balancer pellet she was on, so in the interests of simplicity I now have her on Pryde's EasiKeeper because I have it here and it works well in her diet!

She is still on the flaxseed oil and canola oil plus extruded lupins and hemp hulls and in the last week I have introduced beet pulp at 2 cups per day and for now, I am feeding it dry.

With her weight being good and all the rain we have had I am also no longer feeding her lucerne hay. She gets lucerne chaff in her feed and on days she is ridden she gets lucerne hay while she is being saddled up.

Keeping the lucerne in there is important for me from a fibre and nutrient variety perspective, but with her doing so well weight wise over summer on our pasture, it was too hard to justify feeding it all summer!

With winter approaching though there may be cause to add more in soon!



29/04/2025

5 MONTHS

Mini update.

We are filming videos 12 through 15 for Queensland Off-The-Track's Nutrition Education series and OMG, with her new autumn coat, Allay looks stunning! Near black, shiny and just beautiful! If you watch those videos, you will see what I mean!



29/05/2025

6 MONTHS

More weight and muscle.

In Video 2 of the series I urge you to spend the first 6 months with your OTT just laying the foundation for long term gut health. AND to feed in a way that gives you the time and space to build a strong relationship with your OTT while they are calm and safe!

Then, at the 6 month mark, when those foundations are down, this is when you can start to think about putting extra weight and muscle on your OTT.

Allay, thankfully, has held her weight really well on the journey so far. Compared to when she first arrived however, she has lost muscle mass... she is such a big strong girl and certainly the consistent work while in training had built her up to be super well muscled! Then her much more relaxed lifestyle here over the last 6 months has seen some of that muscle drop away. Not so much to be a concern, but certainly something that I see at this point in time as a challenge I can try and address through nutrition.

It is also starting to get colder and as our days get short, and the pasture less abundant, I am watching her closely for signs of weight loss. And here is the interesting thing I noticed... she did start to drop a little bit of weight, and my first thought, even with all I know, was 'I need to add more hard feed into her diet' (secretly I think I was just excited to have a horse I can actually feed again! 😊)! Then I caught myself and remembered my own advice, which is where possible, always increase the quality of the forage in the diet first. And THEN, if that is not enough, add more feed.

So I added lucerne hay, just one biscuit (2 kg) per day. She was still grazing 24/7 in her big paddock with old Breeze and on her balancer pellet plus fibres and oil diet. And for now, this has been enough to hold her weight steady.

Keep reading for how I start to influence muscle.



6.5 MONTHS

First BIG day out!

We have been working along with Allay at home, creating a strong bond (which the video of her sleeping, laying flat out with Tamaya probably says mission accomplished on that one!) and doing lots of connecting, listening, straight line and collection work, primarily guided by Warwick Schillers' wonderful collection of training videos!

And Tamaya and Allay have been doing just a little jump training, lots of trot poles, some cavalettis and one jump, which Allay has definitely improved at over time... it was definitely something that brain of hers had to build new synapses for! 🤪

We had also taken her on a few 'boring' trips, mainly to my brother's farm, for the sake of float rides followed by calm rides on long reins.

Just over 6 months into this journey now, we decided that a local Sam Lyle showjumping clinic at AELEC was probably the perfect place for her first BIG day out.

So, with much excitement and some nerves, Tamaya and I both did our best to calm ourselves around Allay, and we headed in for a lesson. It was incredible!

Allay was excited when we got there, head up in racehorse mode and way more excited than we ever see her at home, but she was also well behaved... saddled, we walked her down to the arena and after standing and watching with much interest for a while, Tamaya hopped on her and because there was no way she was going to stand still she started doing the 'circles for relaxation' that she and Allay had practiced so much at home... and almost immediately this beautiful big girl started to lower her head and relax a bit. Reality check though, she was a LOT of horse and I've never been so grateful that Tamaya is such a confident and relaxed rider!

Time for the lesson, they headed into the arena, Sam asked Tamaya to tell him about her horse and she said she was an OTT, had never jumped as such before. Thankfully she was in a group of other very green horses so they started out with just trot and canter work, practicing increasing the pace and slowing the pace... for Allay, it was good to be on

21/06/2025



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6.5 MONTHS (CONT...)

the move as those big hooves of hers were finding it hard to stay still!

On to trot poles which she wanted to canter over 🐾 and a few small jumps which she navigated with varying degrees of awkwardness... and then...they eventually built up to an entire jump round, and oh my goodness, this big girl is such a stunning, amazing, beautiful creature and it was like things just fell into place for her. She did that wonderful mare thing of trying her absolute hardest for Tamaya and she pulled out her first ever show jump round, looking like a horse who had been jumping a lot longer than an hour's worth of lesson! 🥰🥰

Videos speak way louder than words, I can't stop watching it because it is just so beautiful to see her jumping and using her athleticism, in a new sport, so incredibly well, so quickly! And such a proud moment for me watching Tamaya guide her and ride her so calmly the way she has too!

Sam even said to Tamaya 'I'm not calling you a liar, but are you sure she hasn't jumped before, maybe with a previous owner?' I think Tamaya said something like 'definitely not, she's just amazing', and she really is 🥰!

So excited to keep watching these two grow together, so much fun!!! 🥰💖

Her diet at this point, with colder weather well and truly upon us and Allay unrugged is:

Current diet

450 g/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's EasiKeeper)
400 g/day	Complete feed (Pryde's EasiGoing)
600 g/day	Complete feed (Pryde's Easi Off-The-Track)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
250 g/day	Lucerne chaff
200 g/day	Beet pulp
100 g/day	Copra Meal (Stance Copra meal)
2 kg/day	Lucerne Hay
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

I reduced these amounts leading into the clinic to bring her energy down a notch, and the day before only fed her the Pryde's EasiKeeper and chaff. Next time I think we will bring it down to this two days out for a smidge less energy!

At home though she is like a kid's pony, plonks around on a long rein, so so quiet! 💖

And a noticeable change is that where she would eat, then walk, then eat when she first arrived, now, almost without exception, she parks herself up at her feed bin, rests a hind leg, and just eats until her feed is gone, I reckon she thinks walking between mouthfuls is way too much effort now. 🥰🥰

8 MONTHS

Some time off.

We all headed up north, (5 hours north of Longreach, QLD) to go cattle mustering on my cousin's property (so much fun!!) so Allay had some extended time off. At home with a house sitter, I decided after some pondering (and ever worried about her suddenly losing weight), to keep her on the same diet PLUS full fat soybean to see if she might put on some weight and muscle.

And she did! BUT, the part amusing/part serious end to this story, is Tamaya came back from her first ride on our return home saying 'LESS ENERGY MUM!!!'... oops.

I do warn in the QOTT Nutrition Series Video 2 that weight gain diets will affect behaviour. And Miss Allay demonstrated it perfectly!!!

So, with Tamaya's confidence and safety being priority #1 and Allay's muscles coming a distant #2, I removed both the EasiGoing and Off-The-Track out of her diet. BUT, I wanted to see if I could get away with leaving the full fat soybean in there, because it was my real muscle building ingredient... and... SUCCESS! Her behaviour stayed beautiful and calm with the soybean in there.

AND, amazingly, even with being in relatively light work, she started to build muscle!

Love my full fat soybean and in this situation it certainly didn't disappoint.

29/07/2025

So her diet, at this stage, is:

Current diet - fibre diversity

575 g/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's EasiKeeper)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
200 g/day	Full fat soybean (Pryde's ProteinPak)
400 g/day	Lupins (Pryde's LupinPak)
200 g/day	Sugarbeet Pulp
120 g/day	Copra Meal (Stance Copra meal)
250 g/day	Lucerne chaff
2 kg/day	Lucerne hay
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
Free Choice	Salt

So it's this diet and pasture... Always pasture 24/7!



And now being late July, it is starting to grow a bit more and provide some decent nutrition in the dead of winter!

Our goal now is to work toward the Interschools Horse Extravaganza (ISHE) held in Tamworth in October as Allay and Tamaya's first competitive event. We have multiple showjumping club days, cross country clinics and various other little outings planned, building her up to a 65 cm one day event and some showjumping rounds at ISHE! 💖

29/09/2025

10 MONTHS

An unexpected hiccup...

What is that saying about the best laid plans... 🤔😅 I took Tamaya into Emergency at our local hospital in the early hours of Sunday for a doctor to assess an infection that had developed at the base of her tailbone (sounds terrible but was nothing to do with her spine, the condition was a pilonidal sinus, infection caused by an ingrown hair! Still, it kind of freaks you out when your child says 'Mum, my tailbone is leaking 🤢😅'). We thought we would just go in, get some antibiotics and be home in no time... we ended up home 12 hours later after surgery before rushing back into emergency for some serious post-operative bleeding. 😞😞

All was well though, bleeding stopped and the surgery was a success. EXCEPT, Tamaya now has a massive wound at the top of her buttocks and is absolutely not allowed to ride, nor could she, as it is too painful.

Less than a month out from ISHE and Allay has no jockey!

So, I have had to start riding the gorgeous big girl, poor me 😅! And oh, my, what a stunning ride, I was in love with her from the ground, but hadn't ridden her as I wanted Tamaya to have that sense of satisfaction you get when you build, learn and grow with a horse for yourself... but circumstances had dictated a different path, so I now have the joy of loving her from her back too!

I had ridden a lot of OTTs when I was a PhD student as we rode a lot of our research horses to exercise them daily, and I absolutely loved them. But most of my riding over the years has been on quarter horses, stock horses and more recently paints. And I have to say, there is something unbelievable about being on an OTT. These horses are bred to move and Allay certainly doesn't disappoint. Slow gallops out in big open spaces for cross country fitness are certainly a highlight and she is such a polite big girl, does not pull, doesn't change pace, just happily cruises at whatever speed we choose to settle on and I think enjoys the experience as much as I do! 💖

There was a small problem with no Tamaya however, which was that I haven't jumped a horse in 20+ years and I wasn't about to let my inexperience mess with Allay's early foundations. Lots of trot poles and a tiny bit of cavaletti work were the extent of her 'jumping' with me.

Which meant, aside from two jump rounds with our beautiful friend and super experienced showjump rider Grainne at our local showjumping club training days, Allay and Tamaya had ZERO of our planned outings in the lead up to ISHE... hardly an ideal preparation!! And yes, cue the motherly anxiety!

But Tamaya was determined to ride and I knew that as a teenager her age, I would have been just as determined, so, with her wound still being dressed every second day post surgery, we made ISHE happen... and yep, I really was anxious!

On the bright side, Allay has shed her winter coat to be a glorious near black who sparkles and she has bulked up. She's still not as muscled as she was when she arrived, but that is to be expected as she is not in nearly the same work! But she looks stunning... so much so that I find myself just standing and watching her because she is so pretty!



16-20/10/2025

11 MONTHS

ISHE.

Oh my goodness, the day finally arrived and I'll be honest, my anxiety was high... how on earth were these two going to complete a one day event, even at 65 cm, when they hadn't even been inside a dressage arena together... EVER! Let alone done cross country!

With a very real awareness that this event was going to put this gorgeous mare into an environment that was going to push her 'at the races' buttons, I reduced her feed waaayy down in the few days leading into the event, bringing her almost back to just balancer pellet, chaff and oil, with the tiniest bits of the full fat soybean, copra meal and sugarbeet pulp.

AND I kept her workload quite high, especially the day before. I wanted to fully utilise this quirk horses have that they will express the amount of energy in their diet, in their behaviour. I was hoping that, even though she is only getting a tiny bit of hard feed, less feed would just take the edge off her behaviour a teeny bit!

We arrived at AELEC with plenty of time to spare, Tamaya headed off to hospital to have her dressing changed, definitely not mentioning to the wonderful nurses that she was about to ride a horse for two days 🤔😭, and I stayed with Allay, helping her as best I could to take in the scene of so many horses and dressage arenas without her going into full 'I'm about to race' mode.

Time for their first ever dressage test (literally first ever, training or otherwise) arrived and I said to Tamaya 'OK, your only goal here, is to stay INSIDE the arena!' 😊 And stay inside they did! There were all sorts of funny antics but despite the wildly different competitive scenario Allay found herself in, she walked out of that arena on a long rein! More relaxed than I ever could have hoped and was super proud of them both!

Showjumping next and a small incident that luckily didn't turn into a major disaster... on their way to the arena Allay and Tamaya got stuck in horsey traffic and this didn't work for Allay who had energy bursting out of her with all of the activity around her.



11 MONTHS (CONT...)

16-20/10/2025

Tamaya said 'I think I'll hop off and walk', and right at that moment Allay reared and sheer inexperience saw Tamaya pull around on her reins, sort of folding Allay sideways in half and sitting her on her bum... Tamaya fell off the back, luckily out of harm's way, Allay got up and walked, thank goodness, toward me, and I think my heart used up about 15 years of its life watching this all unfold in slow motion! 😂😂😂 Both were A-OK though and amazingly, after that start, went on to complete a beautiful, clear showjumping round!

And now, cross country! I walked them to the start and left Tamaya there with Grainne (what would we have done without you Grainne?!) there warming them up over practice jumps. I ran back up to the water jump where our wonderful David was filming and waited. Next thing we knew they were coming, Allay rolling along in that stunning canter she has, as relaxed as could be, jumping everything Tamaya asked of her. Small hesitation at the water jump, but Tamaya gently coaxed her (riding without spurs or whip!) and once she got one foot in and realised it was just shallow water, she happily flew through the rest of the water and they were off around the rest of the course! Clear cross country! And I am relieved, amazed and so grateful for Allay and her beautiful nature and willingness to do whatever it is Tamaya asks! Day one definitely finished on a high!

I laughed at Allay throughout the day as every time we saddled her up she seemed to be thinking ok, I'm about to race... then she'd do dressage and you could almost see her thinking 'don't know what that was but it wasn't a race! OK, saddling up again, this must be the race... no, that was jumping ... saddling again, this must be the race... mmm that was kind of a race, but it was just me and that track was WEIRD! 😂

Day 2 of AELEC was less successful and left me feeling like we had failed Allay. When Tamaya entered this event months ago, we had no idea she would have surgery and we expected she would have done two cross country clinics and a few extra showjumping days, none of which came to bear. So back then, we had entered her in the 75 cm

jumping, and with me, not having the experience in this sport to really know what we are doing, we left her at that height, and it was just too much for her. If Tamaya didn't have her set up exactly right coming into a jump, she would refuse, at one point refusing and knocking down an entire jump with her knees!

Too much, too soon, before she had her confidence and before they had their confidence together... lesson learnt! Sorry Allay!! 💖

The awesome thing about Day 2 though, was we waited... and waited... aaaand waited, and waited some more for events, for so long that Madame Racehorse forgot about prancing around with those feet that never stay still and she literally munched hay and slept alongside other horses who were also waiting! Welcome to life as an interschools horse Allay! 😂 Her new approach to life since then is if they don't need me, I shall be eating or asleep!

One noticeable thing about Allay at ISHE is, despite it being hot, she is VERY reluctant to drink when she is out. She barely drank anything on the first day, a small drink after her cross country was all she managed, despite having water from home, water with molasses, town water just in case she liked it and plenty of trips to a hose. So on the second day, I gave her an electrolyte paste with 15 grams of salt mixed in molasses, and bingo! She drank well waiting between showjumping rounds so I will keep this little trick up my sleeve and keep a tube of molasses salt with us whenever traveling!

If you do want to use this approach, you MUST, must, must make sure you keep offering your horse water after you give them the salt and never ever give them the salt right before you travel. They should have 'free access' to water for at least 3 hours after any electrolyte supplement is given!

MICROBIOME RESULTS

This is probably the most exciting part of this entire journey for me (aside from the ‘let’s get a new horse’ bit 😂). The near single focus of transitioning an OTT from racehorse to your horse is getting their gut back to being a fibre fermenting powerhouse with as many different beneficial microbial species as possible.

While we can watch and see our horses from the outside starting to improve over time, it is now also possible to watch and see, in granular detail, what is going on inside! To see exactly how the microbiome is changing!

To do that, I took faecal samples from Allay that represented:

- Day 1: the microbiome of her previous diet
- Day 30: the microbiome after 30 days on pasture, lucerne hay and balancer pellet
- 4.5 Months: the microbiome after a forage-based diet of diverse pasture and lucerne hay plus 3.5 months of additional alternate fibres added to support microbiome diversity.
- 10 months: the microbiome after a forage-based diet with additional alternate fibres. This sample landed in spring when the pasture was dominated by perennial ryegrass.

And here are the results!

Sample	Number of bacterial species	Shannon Diversity Index
Day 1 – 29/11/24	258	4.25
1 Month – 1/1/25	278	4.51
4.5 Months 12 /4/25	333	4.64
10 Months 7/10/25	319	4.72
Wild Foraging Horses	350	4.9

Bacterial species.

At Day 1, Allay had 258 different bacterial species in her hindgut. For perspective, ‘wild’ foraging horses have been observed to have 350 bacterial species.

At the end of the first month, the number of bacterial species had increased to 278! We had gained 20 in a month. An 8% increase from day 1.

At 4.5 months, she was up to 333 species! 75 more than she started with! And only 17 less than the wild foraging horses! A 29% increase from day 1.

At 10 months, the number had dropped to 319. I suspect because we had so much ryegrass and a spring that was perfect for non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) accumulation. The NSC from the pasture was likely fermenting in the hindgut and killing off some of the bacterial species. The manure smelt acidic when I sampled it (kicking myself I didn’t measure pH!). AND the pasture was dominated by perennial ryegrass which, from observation, she was selectively grazing, and in doing so, was again limiting her fibre variety in the diet.

MICROBIOME RESULTS_(CONT...)

Still, 319 is a 24% increase in the number of species from Day 1! And I suspect that by now (late November 2025) when the ryegrass has almost disappeared and she is starting to graze a much broader range of species in the pasture again, her bacteria species numbers will have increased again! Watch this space as just for interests' sake I will keep testing her microbiome periodically!

Evenness.

Another measure of microbiome health is the Shannon diversity index which takes into account both the number of species and their evenness of distribution. Evenness of distribution tells us whether the bacterial species are roughly even in number or if a couple of species tend to dominate. This index sits at 4.9 in the wild foraging horse group used as the comparison for what we expect to be somewhat 'normal'.

Allay's Shannon diversity index started at 4.25. Then she increased to 4.51 at one month, 4.64 at 4.5 months and 4.72 at 10 months. A beautiful steady improvement over time that brought her within 0.18 points from the wild foraging group!

Summary.

These results are so exciting to me because we set out to feed in a way that supports the return of a diverse and healthy population of hindgut microbes and these results seem to suggest we achieved exactly that! We also have the data on exactly which species we found, but with up to 333 of them, that is just information overload. Dr Belinda from EquiGI and I hope to publish this data though, so watch this space!

11.5 MONTHS

Gunnedah showjumping festival.

Feeling so terrible for putting the pressure on Allay to jump in the 75cm classes at ISHE, Tamaya and Allay entered the Gunnedah Showjumping Festival the very next weekend in the 40, 50 and 60 cm classes to build their confidence back up!

AND they got a ribbon! A first ribbon no less, in the 40 cm class! Tamaya was tongue tying herself, saying they got their first ribbon and their first ribbon was a first ribbon which was also their first first ribbon 🤔

The best thing about this event was the fact we walked Allay off the float and aside from a normal, interested look about, Racehorse Allay was nowhere to be found. She tied up to the float and ate hay as she was saddled, then she was calm and perfectly behaved while jumping and THEN she waited at the float while we watched our friends jumping and she rested her hind leg and went to sleep!!! What a good girl 🥰💖

Local showjumping fun day.

I was so focussed on ISHE as the finale of this journey that I hadn't really thought much about what came after that. ISHE was wonderful and exhausting and bloody hard work with a horse who could not and would not stand still for the first 1 and 3/4 days. But this weekend just gone, Tamaya and Allay attended our local North and North West Showjumping club training day and then a fun competition day, which was a dress up!

Tamaya and her gorgeous friend Bella decided they'd go as Jockeys on their OTTs! I thought how ironic, here we are spending 12 months telling the story of Allay's first 12 months after racing, and we end the year with her dressed up as a racehorse 🤔

But truly this day reminded me what this entire journey was all about. To watch Allay and her 'jockey' racing around, playing funny teams showjumping games, with tight turns, tag team jumping, and gallops alongside 'Buddy', Bella's OTT, through the finish pegs for a second place, doing made up laps of honour with groups of horses and seeing these teenage girls all just laughing and having fun, AND

25-26/10/2025 + 8-9/11/2025

their OTTs happy, and able to come back to a walk and immediately back onto long, loose reins before going to sleep while waiting for their next events... THAT makes all the work worthwhile 🌟💖



12 MONTHS

Worth taking it slow.

This beautiful big girl, while still a whole lot of horse, has definitely realised there is life after racing and that it really is best to just rest a hind leg and close your eyes for a little nap any time you can. Or eat! Whenever there is food available!

I reckon she thinks life after racing is pretty darned good! And we feel super blessed to have had the opportunity to walk this beautiful girl through that journey! 💖

So much of what we see with Allay today is just her! Like almost every thoroughbred I have ever met, she has the sweetest nature, loves humans, loves to work and wants to be close by. She is calm, in fact near unflappable with random stuff that would scare most horses. She's also kind and brilliantly athletic.

But at least a small part of her transition in this 12 months has been made possible because her diet has supported her at every step. Having now Allay-tested the feeding program recommended in the Queensland Off-The-Track Nutrition Education series 'Video 2 - The First 12 Months', it has been a success!

This journey has only served to reinforce for me just how important it is to take the time in the beginning to re-establish normal gut health so that weight gain, behaviour and overall health and mental happiness all have that as the strong foundation they can build on for the rest of your OTT's life.

These days, Allay's diet, when she is in light to

29/11/2025

Current diet - fibre diversity

500 g/day	Balancer pellet (Pryde's EasiKeeper)
60 ml/day	Flaxseed oil (Stance Omega 3 Flaxseed oil)
220 g/day	Full fat soybean (Pryde's ProteinPak)
400 g/day	Lupins (Pryde's LupinPak)
110 g/day	Sugarbeet Pulp
110 g/day	Copra Meal (Stance Copra meal)
100 g/day	Hemp (Stance Hemp Hulls & Hearts)
250 g/day	Lucerne chaff
100 g/day	Oaten chaff
2 kg/day	Lucerne hay on days she is ridden
24/7 Access	Mixed species pasture
20 g/day	Salt
Free Choice	Salt

moderate work, looks like this:

And I just adjust the lupins, copra meal and beet up or down according to the pasture, her workload or energy level. She loves her feed, stands calmly every day and eats every last bit of it. AND she maintains beautiful weight and muscle on less than 1.5 kg of hard feed per day! And that, to me really is the ultimate mission accomplished!

Biggest thanks to Allay for being the perfect OTT for this journey! We look forward to having you and loving you for all of your amazing years to come! 💖💖

And thank you to Racing Queensland and the Queensland Off-The-Track Program for making this journey possible! We hope Allay and her story help guide the journey of many off the tracks into their calm, healthy and happy futures! 🌟💖

With Love,

Nerida, Tamaya and Allay. xxx



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JOURNEY