

# Identification of Horses



## Security

With theft on the increase, there are several ways to keep your horse and equipment safe. Some measures include marking tack and equipment with your postcode, securing horse boxes and trailers with wheel clamps, chaining and padlocking both the latch and the hinge end of your gates and photographing your horse from different angles paying particular attention to unusual markings or scars.

## Forms of Identification

Historically, various forms of horse identification have been used including hot iron branding, lip tattooing and hoof branding. These methods can fade in time and can be altered. Hot branding and tattooing can be especially painful and are not as humane as freezemarking or microchipping.

## Freezemarking

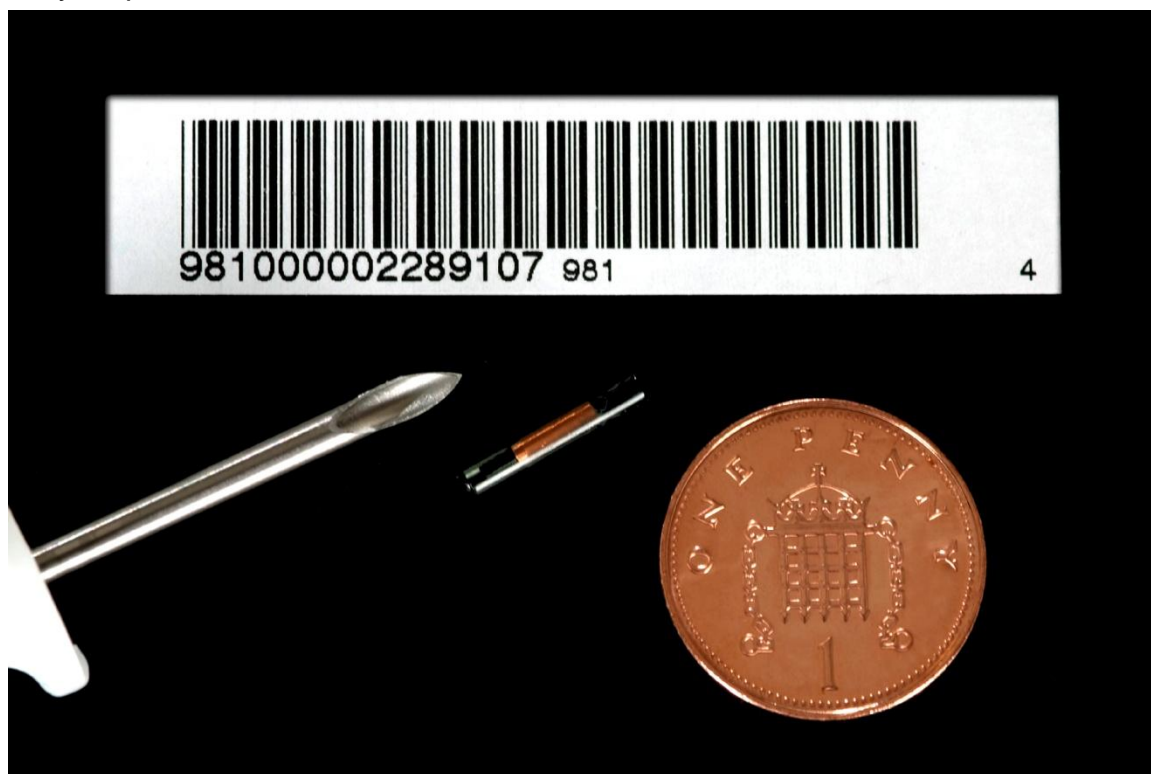
Freezemarking is a means of visibly identifying a horse. A branding iron is cooled in liquid nitrogen to freeze a brand of numbers and letters onto a horse. The cold iron destroys the pigment cells on the skin so that white hairs grow within a few weeks. On grey or light coloured horses the freezebrand is applied for longer to provide a bald mark. The application of the brand causes momentary discomfort before the skin senses are numbed within a few seconds. The freeze branding companies such as Farmkey hold a register of all the horses they brand and supply the owner with a registration document. The cost of freezemarking ranges from £35 to £55, depending on the number of horses done, including the first years membership.

## Microchipping

Microchipping is widely accepted as a safe, effective and importantly, tamper-proof method of identifying horses, thereby reducing the chances of false documentation and improving animal welfare by tracing owners who neglect horses. Whilst microchipping has been compulsory in foals in the thoroughbred breeding industry since 1999, it is only since July 2009 that any foal whether it be horse, pony, donkey or mule after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 has to be microchipped. Petlog is the largest pet reunification service in the UK and is the only UK member of the European Pet Network. The database is on hand 24 hours a day 365 days a year to receive calls from authorised bodies such as animal wardens, animal welfare centres, veterinary surgeons, police and rescue centres.

The recognised standard site for microchipping of horses is by deep injection into the nuchal ligament 2-3 cm below the top left mid crest. The area should be tested to ensure there is not already a microchip present. The microchip to be inserted should be checked before

implantation and again after implantation. Microchipping is deemed an act of veterinary surgery and as such can only be carried out by Veterinary Surgeons or qualified Veterinary Nurses under veterinary supervision. Over the past 10 years as a practice we have microchipped thousands of horses with no problems and as a procedure, adverse reactions are very rare. The skin at the site should be clean but not necessarily surgically prepared. Normally, local anaesthetic or sedation is not required but young foals and some older horses require additional restraint. The procedure takes seconds with a few minutes to do the paperwork and can easily be done at a routine vaccination etc, at a cost of £25-£35 with no further fees or annual subscriptions. It is not uncommon for the site to bleed but pressure applied for a few seconds readily stops this.



Each microchip comes with a unique 15 digit number and barcode. Migration of the microchip rarely occurs in horses with a higher incidence of migration in cats and dogs due to the positioning under the skin in small animals. Microchipping is not a visual deterrent but signs for gates can be obtained from the microchip companies. The British Horse Society and SPCA have always supported compulsory microchipping.

**Further information on the above topics please contact the surgery on 01357 520251.**