

# Horse Owners Insist On A Best Friend

## This Spring's Hottest Sellers

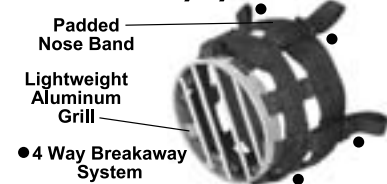
All of our products are developed by horse owners and are designed for durability, comfort, and safety. Every product is made of the highest quality material, superior construction and our muzzles are recommended by equine health professionals.

### Best Friend Deluxe Grazing Muzzle with Breakaway System



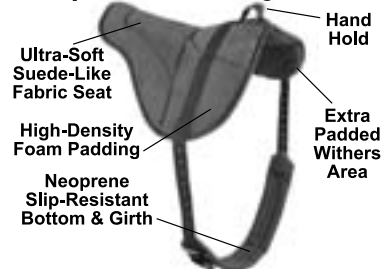
**Controlled Grass Intake**  
Prevents & Treats Founder, Laminitis & Obesity  
Five Sizes: Large Horse, Horse, Cob, Pony, Mini  
Not Shown: Best Friend Standard Grazing Muzzle  
To Be Used With Breakaway Halter  
Same Five Sizes Available

### Best Friend Cribbing Muzzle with Breakaway System



Prevents Cribbing, Wood Chewing & Biting  
Attaches To Existing Halter  
Four Sizes: Large Horse, Horse, Cob, Pony

### Best Friend Bareback Pad for Slip-Resistant Riding



Contoured Shape For Excellent Fit  
One Size Fits Most Horses  
Colors: Navy Blue & Hunter Green



**Best Friend™**

EQUINE SUPPLY, INC.

Creating Solutions For Equine Management For Over Eight Years

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## retail

Roundup

By John Rogers, Business Editor

# And How Were Your Sales in January?

**R**etail sales in the United States for the month of January jumped 17.2 percent over the same month in 2003, according to ShopperTrak's National Retail Sales Estimate. That marked the largest monthly year-over-year growth since data on that topic began being assembled in 1992. The use of gift cards and certificates sold during the November and December holiday period is credited for fueling the hot numbers in a traditionally cold retail month. Cold weather spiked sales of winter apparel. Toys, sporting goods, food and household paper goods were also among the strong performers.

### Oil, Gasoline Prices Climb, Remain High

If you noticed that gasoline prices in your community began climbing in January and continued their upward spiral through much of February, you are perceptive, indeed.

Oil prices hit a 13-year high of \$38 a barrel in February, nearly as expensive as they were on the eve of the Iraq war. Gas prices averaged just more than \$1.66 per gallon at the end of January, up 15 cents from mid-December. Fears that Islamic extremism will destabilize Saudi Arabia and that its vast oil holdings may become unavailable seem to be leading concerns. Also, China is consuming an ever-growing helping of oil as it continues to modernize. For retailers, higher fuel prices mean customers may be less willing to drive long distances to shop at their stores, and shipping costs may increase. For reps, it means going down the road gets just that much more expensive.

### Oregon Has Nation's Lowest Business Tax Burden

If you do business in Oregon or are thinking about moving your business there, there is good news. The state has the lowest business tax burden in the country, according to a recent study written by the accounting firm Ernst & Young and published by the Council on State Taxation. Total state and local business taxes as a percent of private sector economic activity were pegged at 4.8 nationally, with just 3.4 percent in Oregon. Total state and local business taxes as a percent of capital income were 15.6 percent nationally, but in Oregon, they were about half of that amount. To find out where your state ranks, visit [www.ocpp.org](http://www.ocpp.org).

### Is An IRS Audit In Your Future?

The IRS announced recently that it will add 2,200 new positions to its enforcement (audit) operations in 2005, and as a result, more audits of small companies and their owners are expected. Best advice: Don't make yourself vulnerable. Don't put anything into a return that could raise a red flag, anything that's unexplained or out of the ordinary. Among the three most common red flags are deducted expenses for entertainment, home offices and car usage. Between 1996 and 2002, the number of enforcement personnel employed by the IRS fell by more than 25 percent. Now, that trend is being reversed.

### Internet Use Burgeoning in China

If your company has a Web site, the chances of someone in China seeing it are growing daily. Of course, if your site has anything perceived by the Chinese government as subversive, it will never see the light of day. A recent report says nearly 80 million people in China—a country with more than 1.2 billion people—now have Internet access. In 1997, that number was only 620,000. Online shopping hasn't followed the growth in numbers of users. By one estimate, less than 1 percent of Internet users shop online. For American companies, that means a great opportunity to inform the Chinese about their products but not a great chance to sell anything.