INTRODUCTION
Aromatherapy is becoming increasingly popular as a complimentary therapy for treating physical and behavioural problems in animals. Such oils are used to promote relaxation in animals housed in stressful conditions (Graham et al., 2004). Traditional equine management practices can create an environment that results in treating physical and behavioural problems in animals. Such oils are used to promote relaxation in animals housed in stressful conditions (McGreevy et al., 1995). This study aimed to investigate the effects of aromatherapy oils on behaviour of stabled horses.

METHODS
These 2 replicated trials investigated the behavioural effects of aromatherapy oils on 12 stabled horses, divided into 3 groups according to stable design.

TRIAL I
In trial I, 12 aromatherapy oils were separately presented as drops of oil on wooden blocks. Behaviour was videoed and the mean duration of olfactory investigation of the blocks used to assess attractiveness of the 12 oils. The three oils with longest duration of olfactory investigation were used in trial 2:
- Rose (Rosa damascena),
- Roman Chamomile (Anthemis nobilis)
- Peppermint (Mentha piperita)

TRIAL II
In trial II, these oils and Sunflower oil as a control, were each presented individually for five days. On days 1, 3 and 5 of trial II, the horses demonstrated increased relaxation. This may be due to the carry-over effects of previously calming oils.

Discussion
The results from trial I showed that the horses found some of the aromatherapy oils more attractive than others (Fig 1). Further study involving paired preference tests is suggested to further investigate equine preferences for different aromatherapy oils.

In trial II, no significant difference was found between the duration of the nine behaviour patterns recorded on days 1, 3 or 5 of trial II, suggesting that the horses did not habituate to these odours.
Rose and Roman Chamomile are thought to produce a calming effect upon mood (Umezue, 2000 Williams, 1992). The results of trial II (Fig 2), suggest that both Rose and Roman Chamomile do produce a relaxing effect upon horses resulting in less movement and standing alert behaviour.

Peppermint oil is generally thought to have a stimulating effect upon behaviour (Umezu, 2001). The results from trial II suggest that Peppermint does not produce a stimulating effect upon the behaviour of horses resulting in increased relaxation. This may be due to the carry-over effects of previously calming oils.

Limitations of this study included the small sample size, and its short duration, as equine aromatherapy treatments are normally of 2 weeks duration (Faith, 2002). Further study is required to observe if the effects of these oils becomes more pronounced with increased exposure to the fragrances.

Conclusion
In this short-term trial the horses demonstrated increased attraction to Peppermint, Rose and Roman Chamomile aromatherapy oils. Rose and Roman Chamomile oils resulted in behaviour suggesting increased relaxation. This study did not demonstrate any stimulating effects of Peppermint oil on behaviour of horses. Significant differences were found between the behaviour of the horses housed in the three different types of stable.

References