

LOOK AND YOU WILL SEE

Jane VM Nixon MA, Vet MB, BSc, MRCVS, MFH www.nixonequinevets.com

JANE TALKS ABOUT the key points for the preparation of your horse or pony for mutual pleasure and success. No matter the discipline, whether it is pleasure riding, or aiming for Horse of the Year Show, 'balance and equilibrium' between the horse and rider is essential for success. Here she outlines the most important areas to 'enhance balance' and how to 'spot imbalance' before disaster ensues.

Wise Buy

Firstly decide the discipline and level at which you wish to ride; be honest about your own knowledge and experience and select someone with suitable expertise to advise you. Be truthful to yourself, set a goal, and do not be over ambitious. If you are experienced consider bringing on a young horse, but if your experience is limited, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Has the prospective horse or pony the proven ability to perform at your chosen level?
2. Have you the expertise to ride a proven horse at this level?

These two home truths may well help you avoid heartache at a later date.

Secondly, only purchase a horse or pony with good conformation which will withstand the

anticipated workload. A horse with an angular or rotational limb deformity may well not exhibit lameness as a youngster, but by eight years old is likely to be uncomfortable enough to underperform, and by ten years old he may well be overtly lame. For example, horses with outward deviation below the knee are likely to become lame due to not being able to go in a balanced way.

Key Factors for facilitating success:

GOOD FEET

The adage, 'no foot no horse' is absolutely true. Good farriery is essential to maintain good feet. The hoof capsule (wall, frog and sole) is elastic and easily deforms so the hoof capsules must be trimmed by your farrier to balance the loading appropriate to the limb to avoid lameness. Even minor hoof imbalance to both front and hind limbs can cause neck and back pain and is undoubtedly the most common, indirect cause of back problems leading to poor performance.

GOOD TEETH

The horse's mouth is balanced at 3 points, the incisors, the molars and the jaw joint. Teeth overgrowth will lead to jaw malalignment, and consequently pain in the jaw joint [temporo mandibular joint], which in turn may lead to 'one sidedness', neck and back pain, serious evasions and even bolting. Regular teeth

checks are essential to maintain good teeth and a healthy horse.

GOOD SADDLE FIT

The new saddle is symmetrical. A horse/pony's back is not! Attempting to fit a symmetrical object onto an asymmetrical base can lead to back pain. Asymmetry of the horse's back is due to many causes; the most common being; the horse being handled always from the left.

Front feet imbalance i.e. low heels may lead to one shoulder blade being higher than the other and displaced to the withers. If the front feet are 'odd' saddle fitting is complicated; the saddle may slip to one side. TMJ [temporo mandibular joint] pain causing one sided muscle build up or conversely wasting along the neck and back will cause the same problem. Fat on the shoulders varies with the time of year and work load, and can lead to the pinching of the saddle at the points of the tree and will also move the saddle backwards. Always employ a registered saddle fitter from the Society of Master Saddlers to fit and maintain your saddle at regular intervals with changes in workload. www.mastersaddlers.co.uk

UNDER PERFORMANCE THROUGH EVASION

Evasion is either due to pain or fear of previously experienced pain; very few horses are 'born bad'! When considering evasions, their avoidance or correction, it is essential to appraise the 'whole' horse as pain causing imbalance in one part of the anatomy very frequently has a 'knock on' effect elsewhere. Pain may be due to 1. poor conformation e.g. splints and curbs 2. acquired due to bad management such as laminitis or 3. Injury e.g. sacro iliac joint strain, neck vertebrae subluxation, and subsequent bony and ligament changes. Common causes of pain related evasions are:

UNWILLING TO GO FORWARD IN GROUNDWORK

Insufficient warming up/down; front feet pain (laminitis/overlong

feet/hard ground); gastric ulceration; ill saddle fit; and even sleep deprivation (noisy yard)

UNSTEADY HEAD CARRIAGE

Back pain; saddle fit; unbalanced rider. Pain in the mouth (teeth/rider poor hands/inappropriate biting), young unbalanced and the unfit horse.

ONE-SIDED RESISTANCES

Rider/Saddle asymmetry; conformational abnormality causing 'one-sidedness'

BUCKING

Exuberance; ask yourself is it always on either or both reins? Back pain, pain on landing especially over larger jumps.

HOW CAN YOUR VET HELP?

The majority of evasions may be alleviated if the source of pain is quickly determined and eliminated.

However a significant number of problems continue due to a lack of a diagnosis, with frequently a multi factorial cause. These cases require veterinary attention for diagnosis, which often takes the form of clinical examination by the vet of the horse stationary, in hand and under saddle, performing the discipline required with the usual rider and tack. The presumptive painful area is then nerve blocked out [i.e. like nerve blocking a tooth for extraction], and the horse is re ridden.

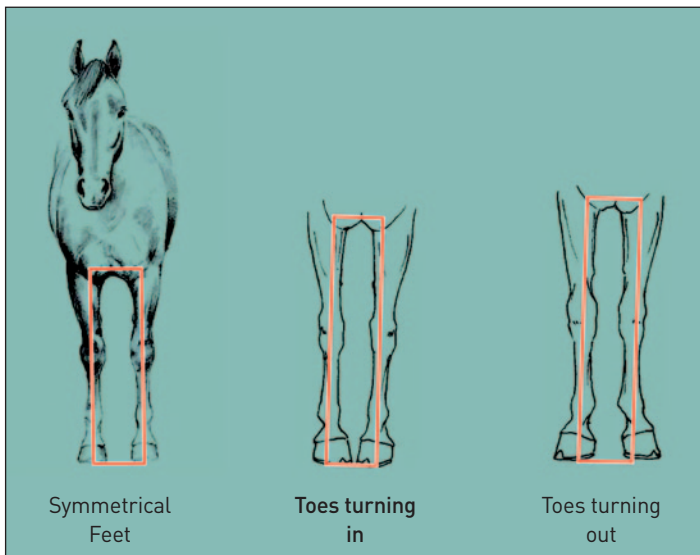
When the horse stops the evasive behaviour, a definite diagnosis is then made.

RELIEF OF LOCAL SPASM IS NO LASTING CURE

Only when a definite diagnosis is made can the evasion be effectively treated.

The veterinary surgeon after making a positive diagnosis will then be in a position to treat appropriately, either medically, surgically, or non invasively e.g. acupuncture, shockwave therapy, or by liaising with all the complimentary disciplines.

Please note: the key to recovery is correct, balanced riding which will also prevent relapse.





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