ARABIAN HORSE ASSOCIATION
Judges & Stewards

# CONFORMATION

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## ARABIAN CONFORMATION

- Arabian conformation is good conformation on a horse that has Arabian type.
- Arabian type is the result of those characteristics which distinguish a horse as an Arabian Horse. Five key elements distinguish type (descriptions in italics are quoted from AR104.1, **Purebred** Breed Standards found in the 2025 USEF Rule Book):
    - Head - Comparatively small head, profile of head straight or preferably slightly concave below the eyes; small muzzle, large nostrils, extended when in action; large, round, expressive, dark eyes set well apart (glass eyes shall be penalized in Breeding classes); comparatively short distance between eye and muzzle; deep jowls, wide between the branches; small ears (smaller in stallions than mares), thin and well-shaped, tips curved slightly inward;
    - Neck - long arched neck, set on high and running well back into moderately high withers;
    - Back - short back;
    - Croup - croup comparatively horizontal;
    - Tail - natural high tail carriage. Viewed from rear, tail should be carried straight;
- The above qualities identify **type** in the purebred Arabian horse. If the horse has these qualities and correct conformation, we have our ideal standard.
- In addition to the descriptions listed above to define Arabian type, the following descriptions are also part of AR104, Breed Standards: long sloping shoulder well laid over with muscle; ribs well sprung; long, broad forearm; short cannon bone with large sinew; loins broad and strong; hips strong and round; well-muscled thigh and gaskin; straight, sound, flat bone; large joints, strong and well defined; sloping pasterns of good length; round feet of proportionate size. Height from 14.1 to 15.1 hands, with an occasional individual over or under. Fine coat in varying colors of bay, chestnut, grey and black. Dark skin, except under white markings. Stallions especially should have an abundance of natural vitality, animation, spirit, suppleness and balance.

**Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian** breed standard as found in AR104.2 of the 2025 USEF Rule Book

- The head should be attractive, with an eye that reflects a good disposition and character; withers well defined, coupled with a strong back that will easily carry and hold a saddle; shoulders and pasterns sloping and conducive to a free, light springy gait and long stride; feet, sound and strong, well conformed. True and straight forward action, winging and paddling to be

penalized. The tail carriage is preferably high.

- Half-Arabians/Anglo-Arabians may be of any size and may show characteristics of any other breed.

- **Conformation** should relate form to function. A horse needs:
  - eyes to see,
  - nostrils to breathe,
  - jaw and teeth to eat and drink,
  - adequate lean neck and clean throat for blood, air and food to pass through
  - neck to use as a balance arm,
  - body to house lungs, stomach and the machinery to operate the legs.
  - strong correct legs are needed to propel the horse as he lives.
- Correct conformation has been an ancient subject of controversy and remains so to this day. Some horses that are considered beauties of conformation are non-functional. They do not relate to either the potential physical abilities or ultimate soundness of the horse. They are, in sum, quite subjective, socially generated preferences – like long tails over short ones or slightly concaved heads over Roman noses.
- When we apply the popular word "correct" to conformation, it should make direct reference to two factors:
  - Conformation that is appropriate to the performance uses of the horse; and
  - Conformation that avoids certain defects likely to render the horse unsound during use.
- Conformation that avoids certain defects likely to render the horse unsound in use are the most important. If the horse is unsound, it will be unable to perform any use for the owner, regardless of how much it looks like an Arabian horse.
- Conformation faults can be listed by priority. Forelegs bear 60-65% of the weight of the horse. Furthermore, approximately 75% of all lameness occurs in the forelegs. Therefore, the forelegs are very important. If the forelegs are badly conformed, they are more susceptible to stress, strain, and concussion. Angle and length in relationship of shoulder to arm determine stride. A longer stride is desirable because fewer steps are needed to cover ground and it is easier to ride. The stress line should come out at the heel and not the center of the hoof. The angle of the shoulder and pasterns will determine this stress line. Horse which are conformed so that the stress line comes out in the middle of the foot are more susceptible to navicular problems.
- The front limb is vital to the horse's function. Flat bone is a description of bone and ligaments and is necessary for strong limbs. The hoof should be adequate to support the horse's body weight.
- Muscle seldom breaks down. Bone, tendon or ligaments are more likely to break down. A straight leg will, with few exceptions, outlast a crooked leg.
- Part of judging conformation is observing the horse in action. Features to consider when observing the horse in action are as follows:
  - Length of stride
  - Trueness
  - Spring
  - Regularity
  - Power
  - Height
- Consideration must also be given to the substance and quality of the horse. Substance and quality can be found in the following:
  - Smooth muscles
  - Clean, well-defined bone
  - Finely textured hair coat
  - Masculinity in stallions
  - Femininity in mares
  - refinement

**CLASS SPECIFICATIONS**

- The rules state that for Purebred Arabian Colt/Stallion, Filly/Mare Breeding Classes. Emphasis shall be placed in the following order of importance: type, conformation,

suitability as a breeding animal, quality, movement, substance, manners, and presence. When Colt/Stallion and Geldings are judged together, the above class specifications will be used except that Geldings shall not be judged on suitability as a breeding animal. Transmissible weakness shall be considered a serious breeding fault in breeding stock. Colts and Stallions two years old and over must have both testicles descended.

- Gelding In-Hand classes may be offered, shown and judged under the same procedure as the Breeding classes. Emphasis shall be placed in the following order of importance: conformation, type, quality, movement, substance, manners, and presence.
- Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian classes will be judged on conformation, quality, substance and Purebred Arabian type, in that order. The Half-Arabian or Anglo-Arabian may show characteristics of any other breed. The foregoing first named three qualities shall take precedence in adjudication of in-hand classes over Purebred Arabian breed type.
- Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian stallions may show in Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian Classes and may also show in Arabian/Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian classes when Arabians and Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabians compete together.
- Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian halter classes may be divided at the discretion of competition management into Stock Hunter or Saddle Pleasure type. Each of the conformation types has been developed with specific goals and standards in mind. In no case should any one type be considered by breeders or owners as a handy place to put less than ideal individuals of another conformation type. Conformation type is determined by the breeding and conformation characteristics, including way of moving, displayed by the horse.
- A Half Arabian or Anglo Arabian entered in the split in-hand sections of stock-hunter or saddle-pleasure at a competition is not eligible to cross enter into classes of the other group at that competition. The two groups shall consist of:
  - Group #1 the Stock-Hunter In-Hand division shall include the following classes: Western Pleasure, Working Western classes, Hunter Pleasure and Working Hunter classes. Stock type horses display the conformation qualities necessary for western events. Hunter type horses display the conformation qualities necessary for all hunter seat events. Horses of this type carry their heads and necks lower than the Saddle/Pleasure type horses. It is shown in a more relaxed fashion and stance. When in motion, the horse has a forward frame. The Stock/Hunter type should be a horse of substance, exhibiting ground-covering motion without excessive elevation.
  - Group #2 the Saddle-Pleasure In-Hand division shall include the following classes: English Pleasure, Country English Pleasure, Park and all Driving classes. Saddle type horses display the conformation qualities necessary for Saddle Seat English type events. Pleasure type horses should display the conformation qualities necessary for any pleasure type event except western and hunter events. Horses of this type carry a high set-on neck of sufficient length and set onto the head in such a way as to allow the horse to sit up in the bridle properly, and should exhibit a free flowing and animated trot. The Saddle/Pleasure type should be a refined horse that is more animated than a Stock/Hunter type.
- Performance Halter (AR123-AR124)
  - For Purebred Performance Halter for a colt/stallion, filly/mare and gelding classes emphasis is placed in the following order: athletic structure; breed type; quality; balance and substance; neck and

shoulder; back, loin and hip; legs and feet; movement.

- For Half Arabian/Anglo Arabian Performance Halter for filly/mare and gelding classes emphasis is placed in the following order: athletic structure; quality; balance and substance; neck and shoulder; back; loin and hip; legs and feet; and movement.

## SPECIFICATIONS

1. Horses must be serviceably sound (except horses entered in Equitation and/or Showmanship). All horses must be in good condition. All horses must have vision in at least one eye in order to compete in any class except Breeding/Gelding In-Hand classes, where horses must have vision in both eyes.

2. Transmissible weaknesses shall be considered a serious fault in breeding stock. Colts and stallions two years old and over must have both testicles descended.

3. A wry tail or one carried in an unnatural fashion is a breeding fault, and judges must consider it as a fault in adjudicating breeding and in-hand classes.

## TAIL PENALTY

A 10-point penalty will be assessed for an unnatural appearance, see AR105.2b.

## MAJOR AND MINOR FAULTS CHART

* in front of Category name indicates a conformation category of Arabian Scoring System.

| *Category* | *Major Fault* | *Minor Fault* |
|---|---|---|
| ***Head** | Overshot jaw (parrot mouth)<br>Undershot jaw (monkey mouth<br>Convex head (Roman nose)<br>Small eye (pig eyes)<br>Human eye (purebred only)<br>Glass/blue eyes (purebred only)<br>Cataract/cloudy eye<br>Lop ears or cow ears. | Excessive length to head<br>Large coarse ears<br>Wide set ears (sheep eared)<br>Excessively close-set ears<br>Narrow head |
| ***Neck and Shoulder** | Ewe shaped<br>Poor hinge<br>Thick throat<br>Excessively heavy neck<br>Straight shoulder<br>Flat withers (mutton withers) | Straight neck.<br>Short neck<br>Excessive crest<br>Low set |
| ***Back, Loin and Hip** | High croup<br>Disproportionally short croup or hip<br>Steep sloping hip<br>Sway back<br>Shallow body<br>Rafter hips<br>Disproportionally long back | Low in the back |
| ***Legs and Feet**.<br><br>*FRONT LEGS* | Calf knees (back at the knee).<br>Bench knees (offset knees)<br>Bow legs (bandy legged)<br>Knock knees (knee narrow)<br>Straight or short pasterns<br>Coon footed (excessive sloped or long pasterns)<br>Tied in knees (tied in tendons)<br>Toes out (splay footed)<br>Long cannons (high knees)<br>Base narrow (stands close)<br>Base wide (stands wide) | Toe in (pigeon toed)<br>Buck knees (knee sprung) |
| ***Legs and Feet**<br><br>*REAR LEGS* | Post legged.<br>Bow legged (bandy hocked)<br>Long cannons (high hocks)<br>Straight or short pasterns<br>Coon footed. (excessively sloped or long pasterns)<br>Stands wide (base wide)<br>Camped out<br>Stands close (base narrow) | Stands under (sickle hocks)<br>Toes out<br>Cow hocked |
| ***Legs and Feet**<br><br>*ANY LEG* | Club foot<br>Dished foot<br>Contracted narrow feet (mule footed) | Broken axis of pastern and hoof<br>Asymmetrical feet |
| **Arabian Type** | No tail carriage.<br>Wry tail<br>Crooked tail<br>Unnatural tail | Low set tail |
| **Movement** | Irregular strides<br>Short stride<br>Wings in | Lacks coordination<br>Paddles out |

## DEFINITIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Type | The look of the horse that identifies it as an Arabian horse. |
| Conformation | The structure of the horse that makes it a sound, long lasting, correct individual animal. |
| Suitability as a Breeding Animal (stallions & mares only) | A combination of all the specifications regarding the appearance of the breeding animal. The horse's appropriateness for reproducing desirable athletic offspring. |
| Quality | An element that we all recognize in all things desirable. The degree of excellence, condition, carriage, athleticism, balance front to rear, and strength required to perform effortlessly and with finesse. A horse pleasing to the eye. |
| Movement | This relates to how the horse covers the ground with lightness, balance, and cadence. The legs should move straightforward gracefully and freely so the strides appear to be effortless. |
| Substance | The perception of strength and power to do any required task for an extended amount of time with minimal effort. |
| Manners | The conduct or behavior with which the horse performs, obedience and responsiveness to the handler, safety being of utmost importance, the willingness to be controlled. Acceptance of the surroundings and other horses in the arena. |
| Presence | The dignified air, the "special look", the "look at me" attitude, the special spirit that gets your attention. The bloom, shine, depth of conditioning and muscle, athleticism and finesse that sets an individual apart from the others. |

## THE PROCESS OF USING A SYSTEM

Class routine may vary, but whatever your routine, make certain you consider the following:

- Position yourself so you can observe the horse standing from some distance (25-50 feet).
- Make a close inspection of the horse.
- Observe the horse's action at the walk and trot from the front, rear, and/or side to appraise the horse's movement.

As a capable judge you must develop a technique to efficiently and accurately judge the entries presented to you. You must know what is important and what is less important.

The required walk will allow you to evaluate the horse in a relaxed natural manner. You can also get an overall view of the quality of the entire class as the horses walk the arena. Routinely the horses are then positioned head to talk around the perimeter of the arena.

You can make your written or mental notes as you observe each horse. Develop the habit of observing each horse with the same routine or pattern of looking at each entry. One of the biggest criticisms of judges heard repeatedly is that *"The judge did not look at my horse."*

The side view from a distance is your first real hard look at an individual entry. From this view you can quickly assess the animal from head to tail. You are looking for "balance" among other things. Balance is how all the parts of the horse fit together. Look for the size or length of the head in relationship to the overall size of the horse's body. Look at the head/neck connection, neck/shoulder connection, slope of the shoulder, length/shape of the back, length and

shape of the croup/hip, the set of the tail. Look at the relationship of the length of the horse's body to the length of the legs. Check the front and rear leg angles and look at the overall condition and fitness of the animal.

Have the horse walk to you in a straight line. Observe foot flight, look at the horse from his ears to the hoof from the front view as the horse approaches you. Observe how the forelegs enter the body. Are the knees pointing straight towards you or do they deviate from our ideal? Does the hoof swing in or paddle out? Does the hoof leave the ground from the middle of the toe or from the inside or the outside of the hoof? How a horse moves will usually be an indication of how a horse will stand.

The handler will stand the horse up for the judge's individual inspection. It bears repeating here that a judge must have a pattern of observation and use it consistently to give each exhibitor a fair evaluation.

Stand directly in front of the horse for your frontal view. Look at the horse from the tips of his ears to the ground as he stands there. Start with the ears. Are the ears large, small, well-shaped, long, short, blunt, foxy shaped, on top of the horse's head or on the side, close together or far apart and lop eared? Let your eye follow down the horse's head from the frontal view. Where are the eyes located in the vertical plane between ears and nostrils? Are the eyes low set or high set? Are the eyes large, small, round or almond shaped, wide apart or close together? Is the head clean cut and well-defined (dry), or is it meaty with little definition? Does this horse appear to have a normal tooth alignment without an obvious overbite or under bite? Is there symmetry in the head, are both sides equal in shape and size?

As you complete your assessment of the head let your eye follow down to the front neck/chest connection, are the shoulder bones wide or narrow? Is there sufficient width, but not excessive width between the forelegs? How do the forelegs connect to the body? Do they connect straight into the body or at any angle with a base wide or base narrow posture? Let your eye follow down the leg to observe the plumb line of the bones through the knee to the hoof. Look for knock-knees, bowlegs, insufficient size of knees, and off set cannons (bench knees), toed in or toed out posture. If splints are present on the leg look for the cause of the splints. Does the leg deviate from the vertical plumb line from the body to hoof to create a weakness that caused the splint(s)? Or is there no evidence that alignment deviation caused the splints. The cause of the splint(s) is more important than the splint.

As you near the ground with your eyes, look at the pastern/fetlock connection for windpuffs or swelling. Can you detect any ringbone or sidebone? Look for symmetry in the size and shape of each hoof. A horizontal coronet band and vertical center line will indicate balance in the hoof.

After completing your inspection of the horse from the front view, move to the side of the horse. For our discussion here we will have you go to the off side of the horse first, but in reality you may choose to go to the near side first. Look at the horse from front to rear. Observe the head in a side profile from the ears, to eyes, to nostrils. What shape is the head? Is it wedge shaped with the "teacup muzzle" or is the jaw as deep as the nostril in the side view like a "mailbox"? Does the head appear to be long or short? Are the branches of the jaw wide or narrow? What does the head/neck connection look like? Does the horse have a clean and long throatlatch or is the throatlatch short and thick which will make it difficult for the horse to flex the poll in a graceful manner and still be able to breath comfortably?

Look next at the length and shape of the neck. Is the neck longer on the crest side than the underside or does it appear to be long on the underside and short on the crest side (ewe-necked)? Does the neck blend into the withers

and chest area? This will depend on the slope of the shoulder. Is the neck set on high or set on low into the chest? Well laid back shoulders usually provide for a high set neck and a short back.

In the side view observe where the front legs exit the body in relationship to the point of the shoulder and withers of the horse. Do the legs exit too far to the rear (stands under himself usually associated with a straight shoulder)? Using a visual plumb line, look to see if the horse's knees are behind the vertical (calf-knees) or in front of the vertical (buck-knees). Look for tied in tendons *the front of the cannon bone and tendon side profile should be parallel lines between the knee and the fetlock). Are the pasterns long or short, sloping or vertical? Is the horse coon-footed with excessive slope to the pastern?

Check the angles of the hoof in the side view. Do the feet match in that they are the same length and angle in the toe and heel? Both front feet should match and both hind feet should match. Is the face of the hoof straight, convex or dished? Are the hoofs smooth or ridged? Are those growth rings or founder rings on the hoof? As a judge you need to be able to tell the difference. The growth rings will be parallel, and the founder lines will be closer together at the heel and wider at the toe. Is there any indication of a "club foot"? A "club foot" is distinguished by any hoof with more than a 60-degree angle.

As you move to the rear of the horse observe the shape and length of the back and how it ties into the withers. Is the back straight, swayed, short, long, wide, narrow, or roached? Look at the depth of the heart girth in relationship to the depth of the flank. The top line of the back and the bottom line of the belly should be relatively parallel to each other with the top line short and the underline long.

Take an oblique view of the rear legs as you approach the rear. From this oblique rear view you can look for bone and bog spavins in the hock area, and get your initial impression of the angle of the rear cannon bone and hoof. From this angle you can also check stallions for both testicles.

As you continue to the rear, look at the hip and loin connection. Are the hip bone and last rib close together and strong or is that area far apart and weak looking? Is the horse wide and strong across the loin or narrow and weak across the loin? Is the tip of the hip higher or lower than the withers? A high hip is undesirable because that may cause a horse to be heavy on the forehand which predisposes that horse to move weight being carried on the forelegs. Horses which are higher in the hip than the withers may give the impression of being sway backed. What makes the horse appear higher in the rear than the front? Is the hind leg too long to look in balance, is the horse post legged in the rear leg?

Look at the angle of the croup from the highest point of the hip to the dock of the tail. What angle is the croup? Is it relatively horizontal or steep, long or short? Where does the tail sit on the rear of the horse? Is it high or low set? Continue down the rear leg of the horse looking at the stifle angle and hock angle. Is there too much angle to the hock (sickle hocked) or is the hock and lower leg too far behind the point of the buttock (camped out)? Look to see if the hind leg is too straight (post legged). Look for hard or soft swellings (capped hocks, curbs, thorough pins, spavins and windpuffs.)

Step completely straight behind the horse and look from the horse's ears, neck, withers, back, loin and hip to see if the horse is the same on both sides. Then focus on the hip from top to bottom. Is the hip pointed (rafter-hipped) or broad, flat and strong? Follow down the hind leg. Is there sufficient muscle mass in the gaskin and loin area inside and outside of the leg? Do the hocks have sufficient size to be strong or are the hocks small and undefined which indicates a weakness? Do the hocks face directly to the rear or is there a deviation? Are the hocks closer together than the fetlocks (cow-hocks) or wider

at the hock than the fetlock (bow-legged)? At the lower rear leg look for deviations from the vertical plumb line in the fetlock, pastern, and hoof such as toe out or toe in.

As you step around to the near side of the horse take a look at the front legs at an oblique angle. Look at the knees; you can see off set knees, splints, toe in, and toe out. Check the symmetry of the front hoof's heels (they should both be the same angle and height and the location of the frog – it should be in the middle of the hoof). Continue around to the front of the horse, reaffirming what you saw on the opposite side of the horse.

At the front of the horse, look closely at the eyes of the horse to check for vision problems. If you are going to check the teeth of the horse up close for an overbite or an underbite, now would be the time to do that by asking the handler to open the horse's mouth.

Routinely now the handler is asked to trot the horse away from the judge and trot down the rail and line up at the end of the rotating line.

As the horse steps off in the trot you are in a position to observe the flight path of the front and rear legs. You can focus on the bottom side of the foot and shoe (if they have on a shoe) to see if the horse breaks over the middle of the toe. You can see if the legs are carried in a straight line or if there is inward or outward deviation. Does the horse promptly pick up his feet or drag his toes in the dirt? Does he carry a natural tail straight and not off one side or the other (wry tail)?

As the horse turns and the judge sees the horse inside view at the trot, does the horse trot soundly? Is there regular rhythm and cadence to his stride? Does he trot freely or is the motion labored? Is there some athleticism in his movement? .

Arabian Scoring System: If the competition or judge chooses to use the Arabian Scoring System, mark the individual score sheet. Check card for accuracy (All attributes have a number circled), sign and turn in your card to the ring assistance or runner

## GAITS

The **type of movement** for each division the Arabian breeds are shown in are determined by the class specifications in the USEF Rule Book. (These rules were written by the Arabian horse community – breeders, owners, exhibitors and judged.) The best type of movement for each division in the rule book was written to describe the most functional and efficient movement for that division.

The **type** of movement should not be confused with the **quality** of the movement. Any type of movement can be performed well, and no one type of movement is superior to another.

***Success in the show ring creates popularity and fads. It has a dramatic influence on the way the Arabian horse breeds are ridden, trained, and bred to move. Judges have an obligation to know the correctness and quality of gaits, as well as how they are applied to each division according to the USEF Rule Book.***

- **A walk is a four-beat gait in any division the horse is being shown.**
- The walk is a four-beat gait, executed in four-time. Four distinct hoof beats are heard as each foot in succession strikes the ground. Two or three feet are always on the ground. The four beats should be clear, distinct and evenly spaced, without shuffling, quickening or altering the rhythm.
- The sequence of foot falls are **(1) right hind, (2) right fore, (3) left hind, (4) left fore.**

- **A trot is a two-beat gait in any division the horse is being shown.**
- The jog-trot or trot is a two-beat diagonal gait with suspension, executed in two-time. The trot should always have two clean beats, with a regular, even rhythm and

tempo. A good trot has engagement, with springy, round and relaxed back muscles.

- The sequence of footfalls are **(1) right hind and left fore, (2) left hind and right fore.**

In the show ring the horses are asked to move at a particular gait and speed, in a specific direction, and to carry themselves in a certain fashion. In each division the frame and way of going varies, but the mechanical aspects of the walk, trot/job, and canter/lope are the same within all the divisions. A horse that moves with an inappropriate type of movement for the division he is being shown in should be discriminated against, no matter how well he moves. The type of movement (or way of going) specified for a particular division should be given priority over an inappropriate type of movement for that division.

## CONFORMATION

*Ideals, Theory and Observations*

This information is not designed or written to appear as the ultimate word on horse conformation by the most authoritative specialists in the field. Rather it is as the title indicates, it is a compilation of acquired ideals and theory mixed with considerable practical observation. Not a little of the information has been a gleaned from knowledgeable horseman who had the ability and patience to explain why a horse works better when he is conformed in a particular manner.

It is also most important to remember that this work is designed as a guide or reference to be helpful in appraising an individual horse for *relative* merit. The perfect horse hasn't been born yet, and there have been numerous horses, handicapped by poor conformation which went on to win the race or bet the competition with only heart.

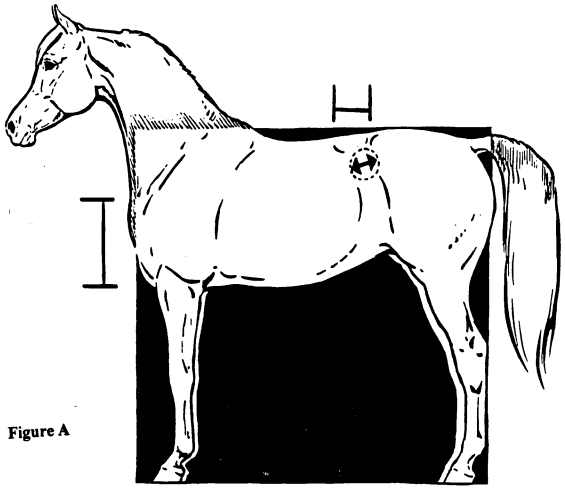


Figure A

**Figure A** illustrates what we would like to call the ideal. He is "on the square", - well balanced and capable of most any chore requiring athletic ability. His body, trunk and legs fall into a square with a level top line, (top of withers to top of croup – not just croup as so many believe), correct hind leg (a line, dropped perpendicular to the ground from the point of buttocks, touches the back of the hock, rear cannon and fetlock), the feet are squarely under the body ("a leg at each corner"), and a sound front leg which fits well in to the shoulder. He has a well-laid-back shoulder and is deep in the heart (indicated by the mark from bottom of the sternum to the point where the bottom of the neck enters the chest). The mark above his back and the arrow at the loin show that he is strong in the loin and "closed coupled" (the proximity of the last rib and point of the hip). In general, he follows the Rulebook ideals for conformation and type. The square may also be divided into three almost equal parts vertically; the point of the shoulder to the back of the withers, from girth to hip, and from hip to the point of buttock.

The horse has good length of neck, is clean in the throat latch, has well set ears, and a good eye, a flaring nostril and a fairly level croup with good length of hip. Our ideal by the way does not have a "table top" croup. To digress: though a good tail set and a highly carried tail are to be sought after, and the ""apple rumped" horse is not desirable, in relation to the croup too level a pelvis often causes problems. Particularly in the mare, where the openings of the digestive and reproductive tracts are in close proximity, one can see that a very level croup throws the anus in such a position (directly above) that the exterior reproductive organs are contaminated with fecal material.

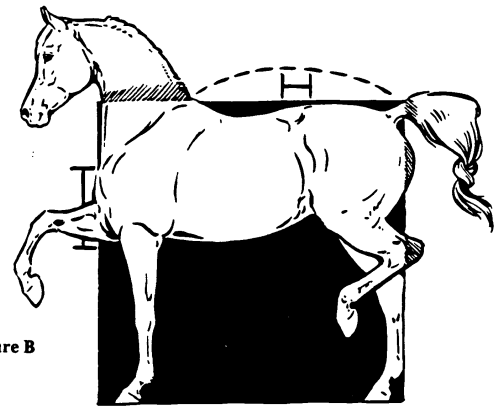


Figure B

Our ideal horse is again illustrated in **Figure B**. He is obviously pleased with himself and shows us that since he has such a good shoulder and hip, and is close coupled, he can properly elevate both his fore and hind legs as well as rounding out or bending his frame (back) slightly as

indicated by the dotted line. (Please note: his mane is not blowing in the breeze and he is not covering ground. He is merely lifting his legs and we wish to discourage anyone from thinking we are making comments on Park action.) With proper collection, our horse is elevating his legs and bowing his back so that not only can he trot, but he can jump well, gather himself for a quick start or well-balanced sliding stop, scramble over Cougar Rock on the Tevis Cup Ride or even execute a *Piaffe* or *Passage*

**Figure C** is a full brother to our Ideal and looks very worried. He has a very similar front end – quite correct. But, he is "off the square" mainly because he has a bad coupling and long back. This makes it extremely difficult for him to round his frame (notice the dotted line) and gather himself. He stands a strong chance of developing a sore back. He has the good hip of his brother, our Ideal in Figure A, but the weak coupling makes it hard for him to work with his hocks well under him. He has difficulty gaining forward motion because of the ill-placed hocks, and he also has a bad time turning and bending. You can see that just the one serious fault – the long back- has limited this horse's use and athletic ability. A gelding that has been used hard for ten or twelve years with this particular fault might be a safe risk, but would you want to choose a broodmare with it? Unless she were a mutation and you could prove it, she would not be the best bet. Conformation is a heritable trait. That means that this fault is a bred in characteristic. That's why a knowledge of conformation is essential to a breeder – not just the endurance rider.

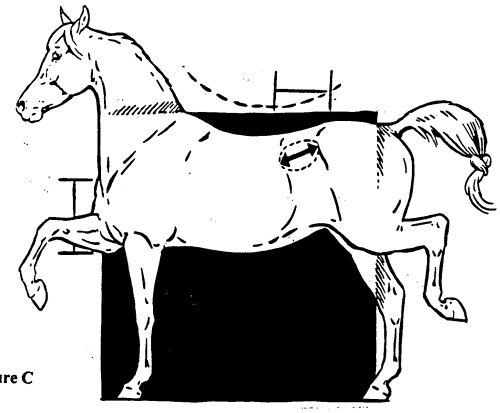


**Figure C**

In **Figure D** our horse on the left has been drawn with a short straight neck which ties-in too low, a steep shoulder and too-straight, short pasterns to match. His whole front shock absorption system is sadly lacking. He would jolt along, "heavy on the forehand", with each concussion apt to foster calcification of the joints, splints and a darned rough ride for a passenger.

Comparatively, our ideal on the right in Figure D has good slope of shoulder which allows for use of the long well-set neck to elevate his forehand and move with alight, well-balanced manner. The pasterns have length and angle enough to flex and give a very comfortable ride.

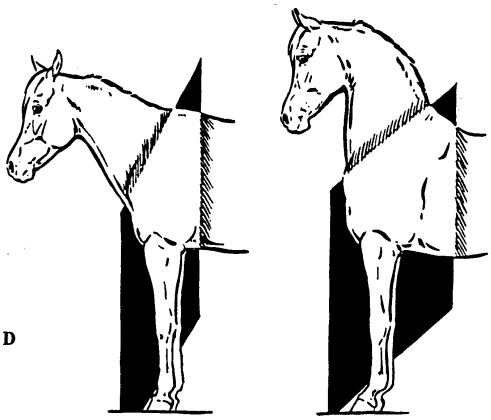


**Figure D**

**Figure E** shows our horse on the left from Figure D when he tries to move "on the square". He ends up with a short back and good hind quarters, but when he tries to engage those hind quarters he interferes with the poor, heavy forehand which has a shorter stride. Hence, the forefeet don't get out of the way and forging and scalping occur. Ouch!

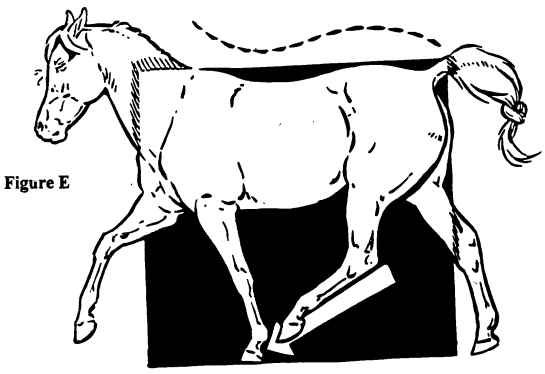


**Figure E**

The reason man domesticated the horse, after eating him for a while, was basically to use him as a beast of burden. To accomplish this task the horse had to be able to move

forward to carry the burden –cargo or rider or both. Since the horse's forward movement and impulsion originate with the hind, let's take a look at a break down of the parts of the horse and what they should look like. The proper conformation – correct bone, joints, and angulation of bones – makes the horse mechanically efficient an effective.

**Figure #1** is a comparison of the human leg to the hind leg of our horse. As you can see, the hip of the horse is the upper leg of man, the stifle is the knee-cap, the hock is the ankle and the hoof is comparable to the toe.

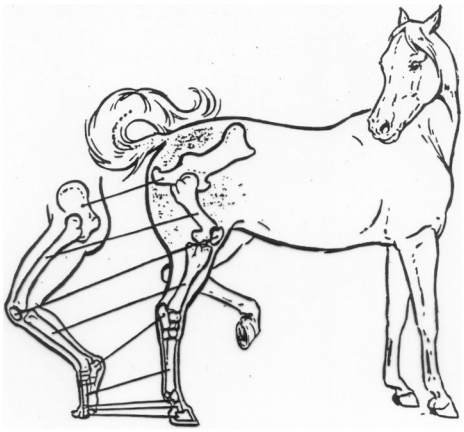


Figure #1

Of the three horses illustrated in **Figure #2**, (below) the top horse is our friend who was "on the square". He and his two comrades show the three basic variations in croup angle. Our ideal horse has a long pelvis, well muscled hind quarters, a relatively long, level croup and a nice tail carriage.

The middle horse in Figure #2 has most of the same attributes but with a somewhat steeper croup angle. And, although he may not have the sweeping stride that our top friend of the level croup does, he is nonetheless efficient. He can perform with agility and thrust from the hocks, but may deviate from the ideal in a halter class due to the croup.

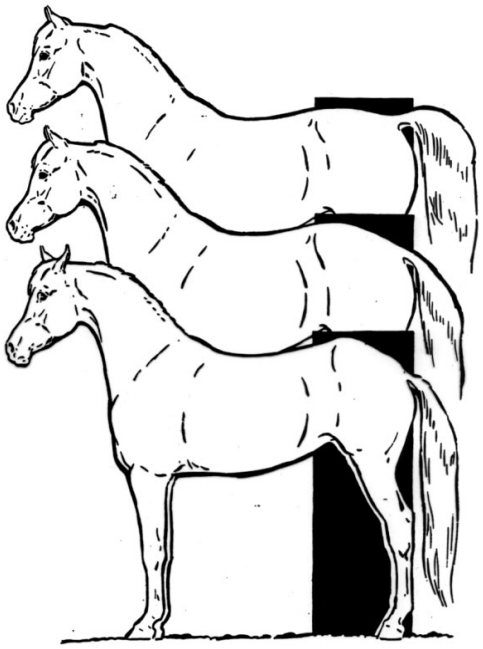


Figure #2

The bottom horse has a croup that is even steeper, but he has a considerably shorter pelvis. He is longer and rougher in the coupling and over the loins. When allowed to become over-fat, this type of hind end gives the appearance of what is often referred to as "apple rumped".

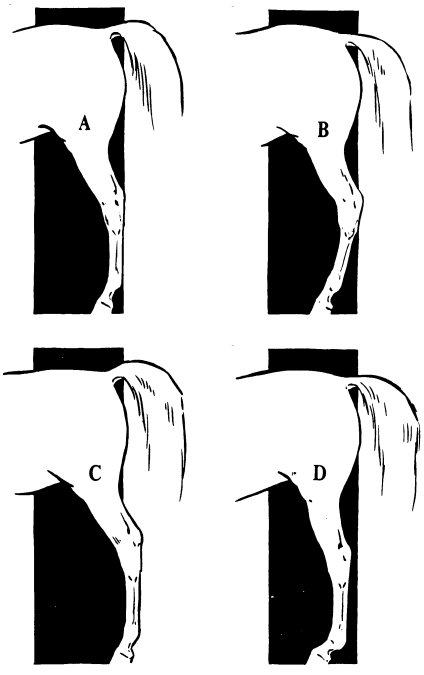
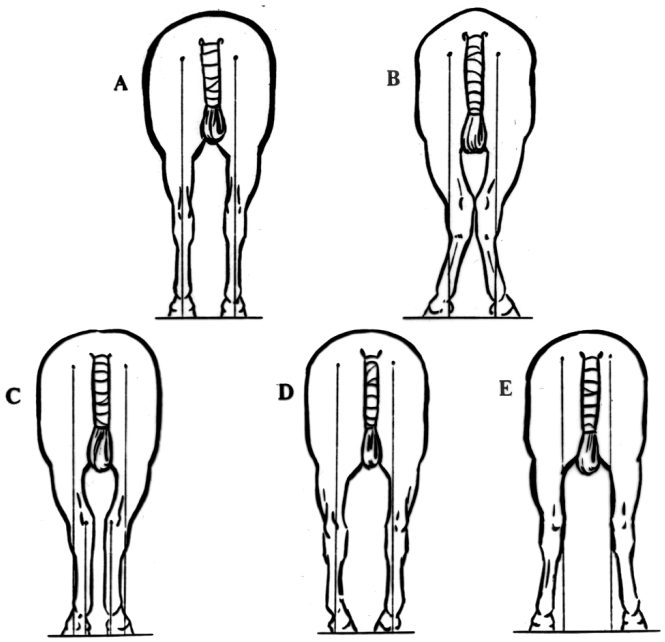



**Figure #3** (right) shows several variations of the hindleg, as viewed from the side. "A" is our ideal whose leg lines up from point of buttocks to back of hock and fetlock. "B" is sickle-hocked. The hock is out behind the point of the butt and the foot is too far under (camped under). The cannon is not perpendicular to the ground and complications arise because the cannon does not fit properly into the hock joint. Unsoundnesses which may occur here are bog spavins and curb. Again, leg conformation is a heritable transmissible trait. Choose accordingly. Example "C" is "camped

out". This means as you can see, that when the cannon bone is perpendicular to the ground, the hock and fetlock are out behind the line from the point of the butt. This horse is more uncomfortable when asked to engage his hind quarter and work in a collected manner. "D" is "post legged" which simply means he is too straight in the leg. From the pelvis to the pastern there is not sufficient angulation. He is probably not very comfortable to ride because his shock absorbing system is inefficient. He is prone to stifle problems and is also "coon footed" as well as being "soft" in the pastern.

**Figure #4** is a view of the rear of the horse as you stand behind him. The first thing you should notice is how different sets of legs deviate from a plumb line dropped vertically from the point of the buttocks to the ground.




In the Ideal "A", the plumb line bisects the center of the hamstring, the hocks, cannon, fetlock, and hoof. A horse thus conformed has straight, smooth action. Both legs on the same side (front and rear) travel on the same plane.

"B" is a truly cow-hocked horse. Hocks are twisted and close together. The cannons do not fit correctly into the hocks, causing curbs, jacks and spavins. This particular individual is also "rafter hipped". He lacks the muscling, seen in "A", to fill out his profile. Often a young horse, which appears fat and sleek from the side, will evidence the rear profile indicated. It is mostly caused from over-feeding and lack of exercise.

"C" is often mistakenly called cow-hocked. He is in reality a very functional individual. Though his hocks are close, the cannons fit into them correctly. He toes out, but is usually not unsound. He can still lift his leg and move out because his stifles are positioned on the sides of his barrel even though his hocks do not fall on the same plumb line.

Horse "D", on the other hand, is hampered in his movement by being toed-in. He is open at the hocks rather than the stifle, and would have trouble where his legs try to move past the barrel as he moves them forward. He is called "base narrow".

"E" is the opposite, being "base wide". He would travel spraddled out with little hock action and would lack the full function of his stifle as well.

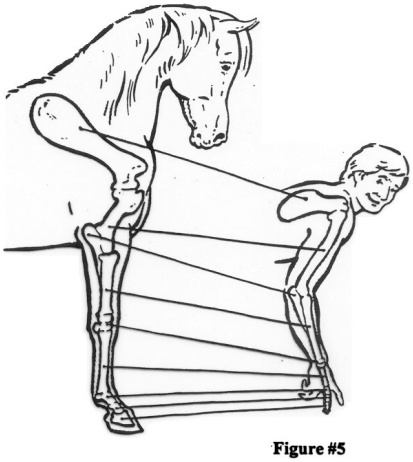


**Figure #5**

Looking at the front end of the horse in **Figure #5** will show how the horse's shoulder and front leg correspond to man's. The shoulder and forearm with elbow compare easily, but man's wrist becomes the horse's KNEE! The bones of the hand come together to form the horse's cannon while the bones of his middle finger form the pastern and coffin bone.

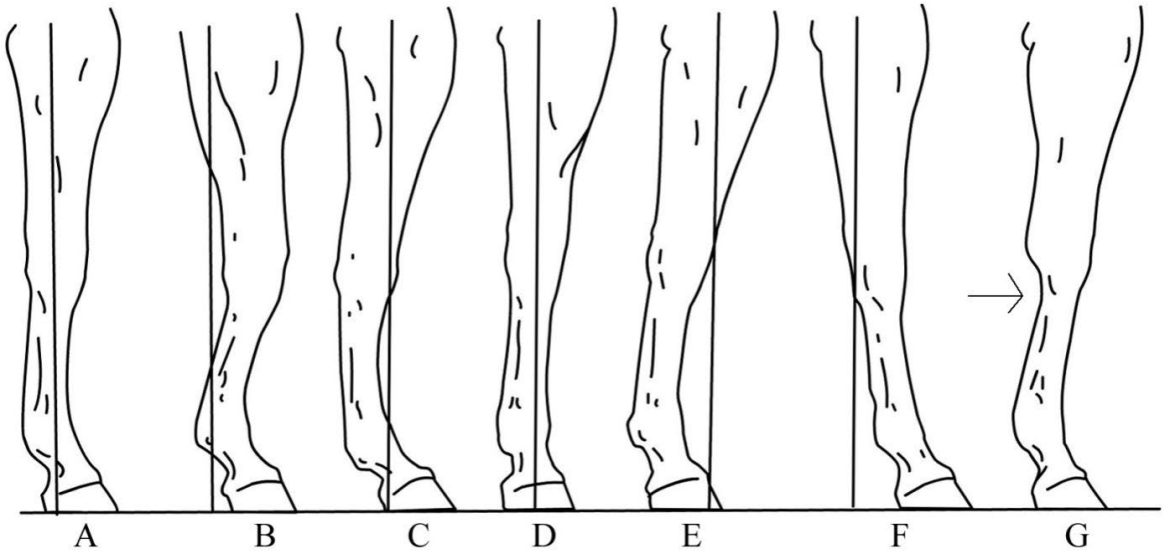



**Figure #6** (above) illustrates various types of forelegs viewed from the side.

- "A" shows a correct leg, straight and able to support the weight above it.
- "B" is "over in the knee", and while the leg is not as attractive as the ideal, it is not apt to become unsound. Though the leg is not quite straight, it will support weight, and the joint has not much unnecessary strain put on it.
- "C" is "calf kneed" or "back at the knee", and this is much more serious. Under stress, the bones in this leg will suffer as weight puts stress in exactly the opposite direction from which the joint should bend. The legs of a horse are designed to accommodate motion with some degree of concussion when the horse's hoof meets the ground.
- "D", being straight and short in the pastern, has nowhere to absorb the shock of that concussion. Thus, he would be rough riding at best and unsound at worst. His shock absorption system is faulty.
- "E" and "F" are respectively "camped under" and "camped out". They do not support weight as they should, but are less hazardous to permanent unsoundness than is the post leg, or "D". "
- G" is "tied in" below the knee. This means that he is lacking support from either bone, tendon or both in a critical area. One would like to see relatively the same depth of bone and tendon at the point where the cannon joins the knee as at the top of the fetlock joint.

The front of the cannon bone and the back of the tendons should form a parallel line as viewed from the side from the knee to the fetlock.

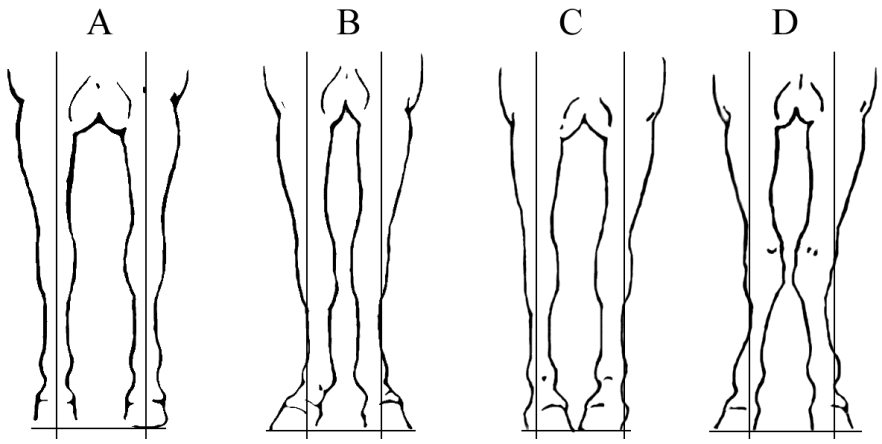



**Figure #7** (above) illustrates front legs viewed from the front.

- "A" is again our ideal. A plumb line dropped from the point of the shoulder would pass through the forearm, knee, cannon, fetlock, pastern and would bisect the hoof.
- "B" is obviously toed out, but not just in the hoof. He starts to toe out in the pastern, and it is this joint that will receive the abuse and show the damage.
- "C" toes in or is "pigeon toed" and is apt to paddle. But he will not interfere with himself, as "B" will, so he is more serviceable, though not much better to look at.
- "D" is knock-kneed and because the weight will be compressed on the outside of the knees, rather than through the center, serious problems will occur when the horse is stressed.

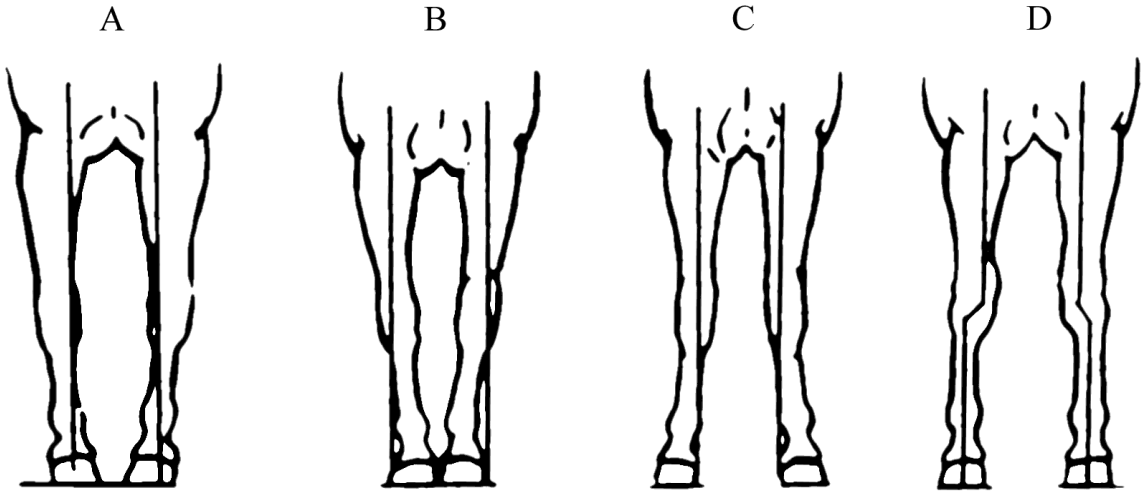



**Figure #8** (above) continues with front leg types.

- "A", being "open" at the knees, will be a clumsy mover and will not be able to trot very well.
- "B" is base narrow and
- "C" is base wide. Both horses will lumber in their gaits because of poor movement in the shoulders. The former is open at the elbows while the latter is closed.
- "D" is "bench kneed" – he has offset cannons. In other words, the cannons don't come down out of the center of the knee. He will develop high splints and knee problems when stressed.

Stress constitutes hard work such as long hours working cattle, racing, endurance riding or playing polo. Many of our show horses are never actually stressed to these extremes.

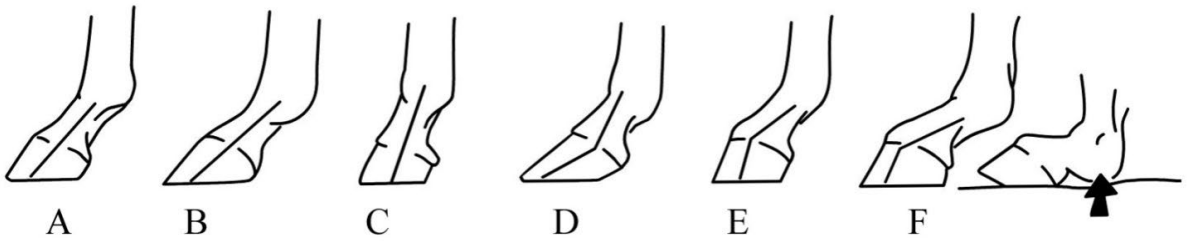



**Figure #9** (above) concentrates on the lower leg and hoof.

- "A" is the ideal, with good length of pastern and both pastern and hoof at the correct angle to the ground. "B" and "C" show basically improperly trimmed feet. "B" is long in the toe and "C" is short with too much heel. Both have the correct equipment, but it has been artificially misused.
- "D" and "E" show corresponding hooves corresponding to "B" and "C", but the leg above does not follow the same line, hence, the broken angle effect. Both "D" and "E" stress the coffin bone and promote unsoundness.
- "F" in Figure #9 shows a "coon foot" or a horse soft in the pastern. The pastern is long and the attachments are weak. Under stress of a hard gallop or hard stops and rough ground, this horse will eventually injure the sesamoid bone. His gait will also be too springy and camel like. One can often tell if a horse tends toward this problem by close examination of the ergot. If the ergot is rubbed off or infected, or if the surrounding hair is gone, there may be room for question.

**Figure # 10** (below) compares the head of a typical "cold blooded" horse with that of a typical Arabian. There is an overall intelligent look about the Arabian's head that the other simply doesn't possess. There is refinement in the well chiseled, clean head. The space between the eyes leaves room for some thought to occur. The placing of a large eye, well set on the head, will make a horse appear more intelligent in his actions even if he isn't any smarter than his companion. He will have a better disposition simply because he can see more things efficiently. He can see what is around him and behind him with less head adjustment. Because of his increased powers of observation, not as many things will spook him or surprise him. The peripheral vision of the pig-eyed cold-blooded horse will often cause him to see things much later as they approach him from side or behind

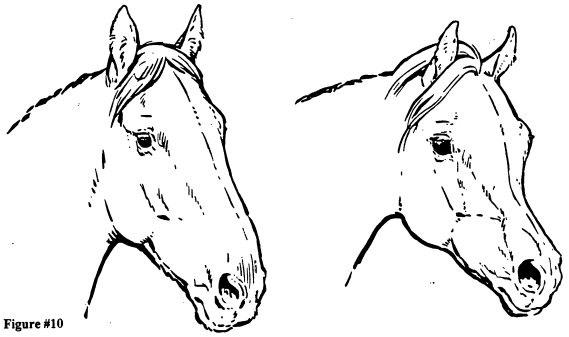


Figure #10

The forehead of the Arabian is properly called the "Jibbah" by the Bedouin and had great value placed upon it. They believed the better the jibbah in terms of swell and breadth, the better the chance for intelligence in the animal.

The large, flaring nostril allows for adequate air intake under stress conditions. A clean throat latch and space between the branches of the jowls also aid in the horse's breathing process.

Figure #11

**Figure # 11** (above) shows the ideal horse in the center with a short –necked coarse-throated companion on the left. To the right of our ideal, a double-headed arrow indicates what is meant by space between the jowls. If the horse is to work with a proper head set, and still be able to breathe properly when moving, his windpipe cannot be compressed. Narrow bars and thick throat latch restrict the supply of air and cause the horse to resist the rider's wishes by throwing or lugging his head in order to breath.

Figure #12

**Figure # 12** (right) indicates three types of necks.

- At the top is our ideal. He is long from poll to crest and long and clean in the throat latch. He has room to flex, give to the bit and bend through the neck – and still breath efficiently.
- The middle horse has a reasonably long neck, but is not long in the throat latch region. His neck bulges below the jowl and will lack the grace with which our ideal handles his head and neck. Even if his breathing is not interfered with, he will still be less supple and responsive to the trainer's wishes.
- The bottom horse has a short, straight neck which will cut down considerably on the grace and elasticity with which he moves. He will not be well balanced and will have more trouble than our ideal in rounding his back and engaging his hindquarters. This sort of neck usually fits less well into the shoulder and such a horse does not move "on the square".

The whole reason for knowing what is correct when talking about conformation is that conformation has a direct bearing on how the horse moves or performs his given duty. A horse can be beautiful, but not be able to move without injuring himself. As the horse was developed as a beast of burden for man, he must be able to satisfactorily complete a task for a period of time. If he can't he is worthless – no matter how pretty he is standing around.

The **trot** is the most significant and descriptive gait the horse has to offer to the educated horseman's eye, and we are only scratching the surface of the imperfections in a horse's way of going.

**Figure #13** (right) shows three different horses trotting toward the viewer.

- "A" is our ideal. His front legs move straight and true. They travel in the same plane from front to back with no deviation. The hoof prints below each subject track the motion of each hoof.
- "B" is probably a wide-chested horse that might stand a little pigeon-toed. He "paddles" as he moves out. The hoof tends to swing out from the vertical plane causing an arc rather than a true straight-ahead motion. This horse would not be apt to go unsound as seriously as would his companion to the right.
- Horse "C" is the worst mover. He is base narrow and wings as he moves. As he strides forward, his hooves deviate from the vertical plane toward the inside. A horse that wings severely will injure himself by hitting the inside of the coronet, fetlock or cannon as the opposing hoof passes.

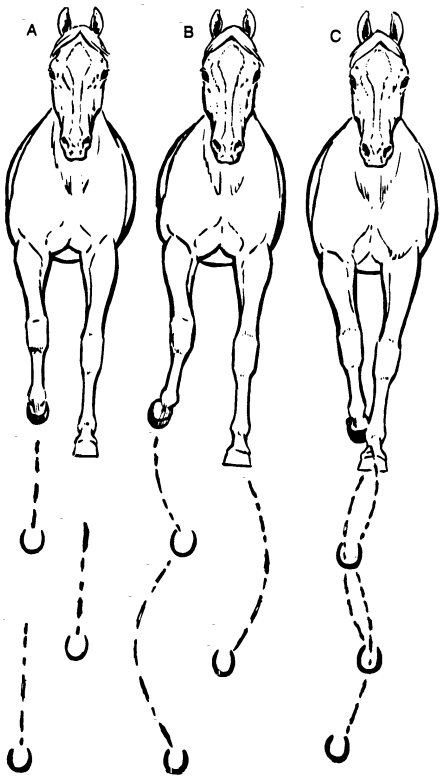
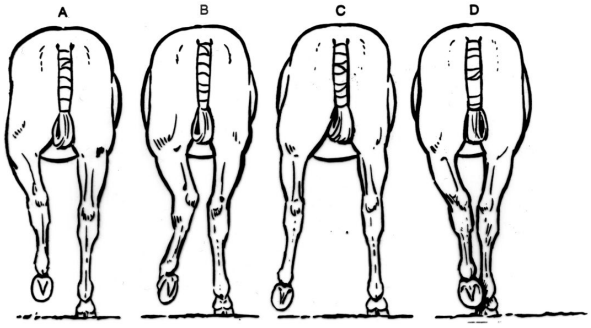



**Figure #14** (below right) shows four horses moving away at a trot.

- "A" is correct, moving with his hind legs in the same plane as his front legs.
- "B" is moving too close at the hocks and toes-out, but he is wide at the stifle and can move freely. He will be able to get his hocks well under himself and will generally be a very serviceable mount.
- Horse "C" moves poorly in comparison, as he is narrow at the stifle and moves base-wide. He would have restricted hock action and a "spraddled out" way of going.
- The worst problems are seen in horse "D", however. His legs are set close at both the hocks and fetlocks. He is base-narrow and his hooves stand a very good chance of interfering with each other as he moves.



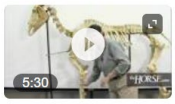

Perfectly moving horses are few, but available. The trick in choosing breeding horses is finding those that approach perfection in their legs, as well as type desired. The trick in choosing a riding horse is finding either the perfection mentioned or in knowing which faults can still leave a horse serviceable, sound and useful for the duration of his life.

Additional Resources:

- USEF Rule Book, Arabian/Half-Arabian Chapter
- Video – Performance Halter
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6Y4WgURiaA&ab_channel=ArabianHorseAssociation
- https://www.horsesandus.com/

YouTube
https://www.youtube.com › watch

The Horse's Skeleton: Overview - YouTube

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