

Conformation

This section provides some basics on conformation...

Body dimensions and performance Major contributions to a good-bodied horse include long, sloping shoulders, short, strong back, long underline and long, rather level croup. If shoulders are long and sloping, they extend the stride in running, absorb shock, reduce stumbling, move the elbows away from the girth, and raise the head slightly. They should be surmounted by clean, high withers that extend well backward to afford maximum security of the saddle.

Short backs and long underlines move the fore and rear legs farther apart, tend to raise the croup and head, contribute to style and action, and increase height and length of stride. Also, short backs are stronger, reduce the length of coupling (hip bone to last rib), and are usually more muscular than others. Finally, well-sprung ribs that blend into hips and shoulders with minimum roughness tend to accompany short backs.

Long, rather level croups accommodate more muscling, increase style and balance, and are less often associated with crooked hind legs. Since all of the power used in motion comes from the hindquarters, muscular development should be extensive, commensurate with breed requirements. Breeching, thighs and gaskins should be especially muscular. Long, smooth muscles are preferred to those that are short and bunched. Leverage is gained with maximum length from hip to hock and minimum length of cannon. These dimensions are developed to a high degree in breeds that race. (i.e. thoroughbreds)

Smoothness, balance and symmetry are a result of all parts blending together, being of proportionate size, and each contributing equally to the whole of a symmetrical individual. These combined with refinement, alertness and a proud carriage contribute to style.

Leg set Be thorough when observing leg set of a horse. Proper leg set is essential to durability and good action. A leg should be properly positioned under each corner of the body, knees and hocks should not deviate inward or outward, and feet should point straight forward. If a horse stands straight, he will probably move straight. Conversely, if he stands on crooked legs, he must move likewise. Crooked moving detracts from appearance, wastes energy and predisposes to unsoundnesses.

Legs should be positioned on the corners of the body. A straight line drawn from the arm downward should bisect the forearm, knee, cannon, fetlock, and pass behind the bulb of the heel. A line drawn from the point of the shoulder downward should bisect the arm, knee, cannon, fetlock, pastern, and hoof. When viewed from the side, a straight line drawn downward from the back of the buttock should touch the back of the hock, cannon, and fetlock. Viewed from behind the line should bisect the gaskin, hock, cannon, fetlock, pastern, and foot.

Pasterns should be medium in length, sloped at approximately 45 degrees, and flexible but strong. Hoofs should have the same angle as pasterns, and be deep and wide at the heels, moderate in size, dense of horn, and free of rings. White hoofs are softer (wear faster) than others. Slope of shoulders and pasterns and expansion of heels account for shock absorption when the horse is in motion.

Bones should be adequate in size, show definition of joints, and should appear flat viewed from the side, compared to a front view. Bone spavins, bogs, thoroughpins, and weakness are common to sickle hocks. Jarring from short, straight pasterns and shoulders predisposes to side bones, stiffness, bogs, and lameness. Pigeon toes tend to wing, whereas splayed feet tend to swing inward in motion.

Effect of head and neck on flexibility The length and shape of a horse's neck and size of his head affect action. The neck should be long, slightly arched, and fine and clean at the throatlatch for maximum balance, style and maneuverability. Fine throats enhance ease of breathing and allow maximum flexion of the chin without binding the jaws on the neck. Short-necked, thick-throated horses "steer" hard and may be "head slingers" from jaw pressure when pulled up short. Size of head should be in accord with breed requirements. Ears should not be oversized and should be carried alertly. Eyes should be wide-spaced, large and clear. Nostrils should be large but refined, and lips firm instead of pendulous.

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