

Conformation Counts...

Hind Leg Conformation

Text and drawings by Heather Smith Thomas

Poor hind leg conformation can lead to stifle and hock problems, which may show up as improper gait, or behavioral problems under saddle because the horse is hurting.



Photo By Bob Langrish

Tennessee Walking Horse stallion, IVORY PAL (see page 61), demonstrates the use of his powerful hind legs at liberty in his paddock.

Proper conformation of hindquarters and hind legs is very important, playing a major role in how the horse travels, whether or not he'll have limb interference, whether he'll be fast or slow, clumsy or agile, suffer from "locked stifles" or be likely to develop hock problems such as spavin or curb.

The hindquarters provide much of the propelling power of the horse, possessing groups of muscles that are larger and more powerful than those of the front legs. The hind legs must hold the entire body weight at times, and are also important when the horse "puts on the brakes" for stopping. To evaluate your horse's hind legs, let's start at the top and go down.

Hindquarters

THE TERM *HINDQUARTERS* REFERS TO THE ENTIRE HIND END OF THE HORSE. THE TOP OF the hindquarter, from croup (highest point) to tail head is often called the *rump*. The muscle from croup to tail (on either side of the backbone) is called the *quarter*.

All the major muscles of the hindquarters attach to the pelvis; the longer the pelvic bones, the longer and more powerful those muscles will be. The top of

The horse's hind legs are usually less subject to lameness than the front legs, because the hinds suffer less concussion and trauma; they carry less weight. But **poor hind leg conformation can lead to hock and stifle problems** (and subsequent lameness).

rump can be sloped or nearly level. A slight slope is considered ideal. Too much slope often means a short pelvis.

From behind, the hindquarters should look square or slightly pear shaped, with the rump gently rounded and symmetrical. If a horse has really narrow hindquarters there isn't enough room for good muscling. This also puts his hind legs too close together at the top (and possibly splay-footed and base wide at the feet), which may create problems with gait or hind leg interference.

Hindquarters too wide are also undesirable, putting the legs too far apart at the top and the feet too close together (base narrow).