

THE NATURE OF INTERFERENCE

Do your horse's hooves hit one another when he's moving forward? It's a manmade problem that can be corrected using a natural hoofcare approach.

BY JAIME JACKSON

No one likes interference. In terms of equine health, interference refers to the hooves colliding with one another or with the legs above the hoof. There are as many types of interference as there are purported causes. The two most common causes are forging (over-reaching hind to front), and clipping (aka brushing, wherein the left and right feet strike each other).

There are countless reasons given for these and other types of interference, ranging from the horse's conformation to poor riding skills, lameness and the type of work the horse must endure. Accordingly, remedies may entail "corrective shoeing" (e.g. for forging, you "roll the toe" of the front shoe and "square the toe" of the hind shoe), using "bell boots", changing bits or the saddle to "correct" the horse's frame and forward motion, and so on.

A different take

NHC practitioners like myself see interference through a somewhat different lens and, not surprisingly, treat the matter differently (if less conventionally) than described above.

First, let's begin with a different definition of interference, then move to cause and elimination. From the NHC perspective, inter-

ference is not at all natural to the horse. It is entirely "manmade", and correctable when we better understand the cause and how to resolve the issue.

Natural gaits

I define interference as an obstruction of the horse's natural gaits. Of course, you must know and appreciate what natural gaits are before you can address the problem. Fortunately this is not hard to do and, for the sake of discussion, I will assume the horse is not clinically lame. Follow these simple steps:

1 Make sure the hooves are naturally shaped; this will entail the services of a professional NHC practitioner.

2 Turn the horse loose with other horses, unbridled/unsaddled and without a rider, in a large turnout so they can engage each other vigorously in "horse play". This will give you a moving picture of the horse's natural gaits. Spend time studying them. In my many years since giving up shoeing and becoming a dedicated NHC practitioner, I have not witnessed a single instance of interference under these circumstances. The horse's conformation and his temperament, regardless of what they are, will make no difference. As I said before, interference is manmade – it is not natural.

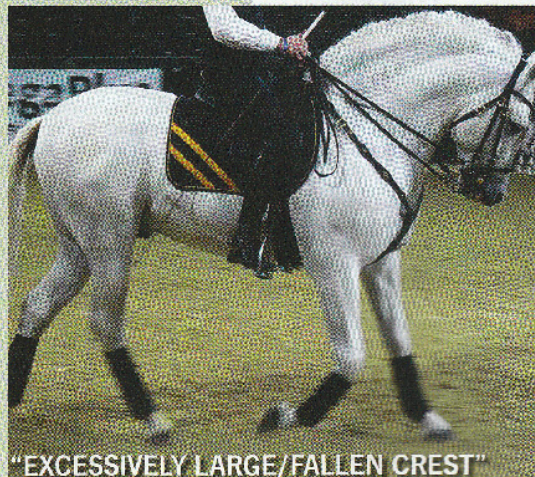
Common terms & myths



"EWE/UPSIDE DOWN NECK"

Myth: A ewe neck is counter-productive to collection and proper transitions, as the horse only elevates his head and doesn't engage his hind end.

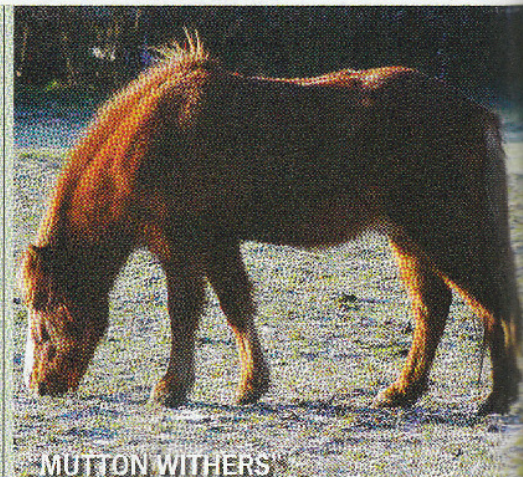
J. J.: The unnaturally shaped hooves on this horse compromise natural stance and movement. Stress rings suggest chronic laminitis, further contributing to gait obstruction.



"EXCESSIVELY LARGE/FALLEN CREST"

Myth: An excessively large crest not only looks bad, but puts more weight on the forehead.

J. J.: This clearly anguished horse is over-bent by the rider's hands/bit, which forces the horse onto his forehead. He is also shod, and faintly visible stress rings in hind foot indicate sub-clinical laminitis, corroborated by his "cresty neck" – more the product of carbohydrate overload than conformational defect. But the leg wraps are telltale of gait obstruction.



"MUTTON WITHERS"

Myth: If mutton withered, the horse has less range of motion when extending the head and back muscles, so is less able to elevate his back with his head and neck extended, affecting his ability for collection.

J. J.: More nonsense. This horse is perfectly capable of raising his head and neck, and collecting himself as needed to support shifting body weight to his hindquarters.


Classical horsemanship

If your horse is interfering, try the above two steps. If he stops interfering then it is simply a matter of addressing your horsemanship. I do not recommend trying to analyze the type of interference, nor do I recommend conventional remedies. Instead, I recommend the tenets of classical horsemanship, which parallel my own construct of natural horsemanship based on the wild horse model. As a lead in to the subject, I recommend highly Alois Podhajsky's *Complete Training of Horse and Rider*.

A natural resolution

The problem with interference, if not corrected the natural way, is that it invariably leads to lameness. This is enough to bring riding to a halt for most horse owners. But where does this leave the horse? Hopefully not devastated.

Particularly extreme (e.g. competitive) riding, unnatural boarding conditions, mechanically obstructive shoeing and unnatural trimming methods cause the most damage and are of the greatest concern.

Interference need not plague any horse. But it is up to you to use nature's way to get him going again, sound and happy! 

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Other terms & myths

Too long humerus – This fault occurs when the shoulder muscles become overstretched and the movement of the forearm is decreased. Movement is constricted and the horse is more likely to be clumsy.

Turned in/tied in elbow – This conformation will make the horse toe out, and tend to wing in when the knee is flexed. The feet may cross over, and the horse could stumble as a result.

Pasterns short and upright – The horse has reduced mechanical efficiency for lifting and breaking over the toe, so he may trip or stumble.

Pasterns long and sloping – There is a delay time to get the feet off the ground to accelerate.

Toed out/splay footed – Causes winging motion that may lead to interfering injury around fetlock or splint. As horse wings inward, there is a chance he may step on himself, stumble and fall.

Base narrow in front/toed out or toed in – Causes a winging motion, leading to interfering.

Stands close behind/base narrow behind – The hooves tend to wing in, so the horse is more likely to interfere.



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