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horses and horsemanship

an educational resource



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COLOR AND COLOR MARKINGS

Black points. Main, tail and legs black or darker than the rest of the horse.

Brand. A mark of identification. A private registered mark burned on cheek, shoulder, or hip.

Cross. A dark stripe across the shoulders.

Flame. A few white hairs in center of forehead.

Tucked up. Thin and cut up in the flank like a greyhound.

Walleyed. Iris of the eye of a light color.

A good horseperson needs a working knowledge of horse colors and markings. The beginning horseperson should become familiar with the following descriptions of the five basic horse coat colors and the five variations to these colors. These descriptions will be helpful in building the foundation for a working knowledge of horse color characteristics.

The first and most important group is the basic coat colors which are applicable to all horses. These color terms are all commonly used. White feet and markings may occur with any basic coat color.

FIVE BASIC HORSE COAT COLORS

Bay - A bay colored horse may be hard to describe, but easy to distinguish. It is a mixture of red and yellow. A light bay shows more yellow, a dark bay more red. The darkest is the mahogany bay, which is almost the color of blood, but without the red overtone. Bays always have black points (black mane, tail, and lower portion of the legs, except for any white markings on the legs).

Black - A black horse almost invariably has black eyes, hooves and skin. The points are also black. Tan or brown hairs on the muzzle or flank indicates that the horse is not a true black but a seal brown.

Brown - A brown horse is one with brown coloration. Many brown horses are mistakenly called black, because they are so dark. A close examination of the hair on the muzzle and around the lips will quickly tell whether the horse is brown or black. The mane and tail are always dark.

Chestnut - (Sorrel) A chestnut horse is basically red. The mane and tail are normally the same shade as the body. If the mane and tail are lighter in color than the body, the horse is termed a flax or flaxen chestnut. The mane and tail of a chestnut horse are never black. Chestnut varies from a bright yellowish red to a rich mahogany red.

White - A white horse has snow-white hair, pink skin and brown eyes. The true white horse is born pure white and dies the same color. Very little, if any, seasonal change takes place in the coat color. Age does not affect it.

FIVE MAJOR VARIATIONS TO COAT COLORS

Dun - (Buckskin) The dun horse is one with dominant hair in some shade of yellow. A dun horse may vary from a pale yellow to a dirty canvas color with mane, tail, skin, and hooves grading from white to black. Duns may have a dorsal stripe down their backs and barring on the knees and hocks. There are special colors of dun ranging from cream (the lightest) through palomino color to duns with black points. A zebra dun is one with black points and a zebra stripe or stripes on legs and withers. A red dun has a reddish orange cast, often with a red strip down the back and a red mane and tail. Grullo (grew yo). This dun horse has yellow hairs mixed with brown or black. They always have black points. This coloration is permanent (not affected by age). Most have a mouse-gray appearance, but some seem purple or smoke colored. Most have a dorsal stripe and have zebra strips on legs and withers.

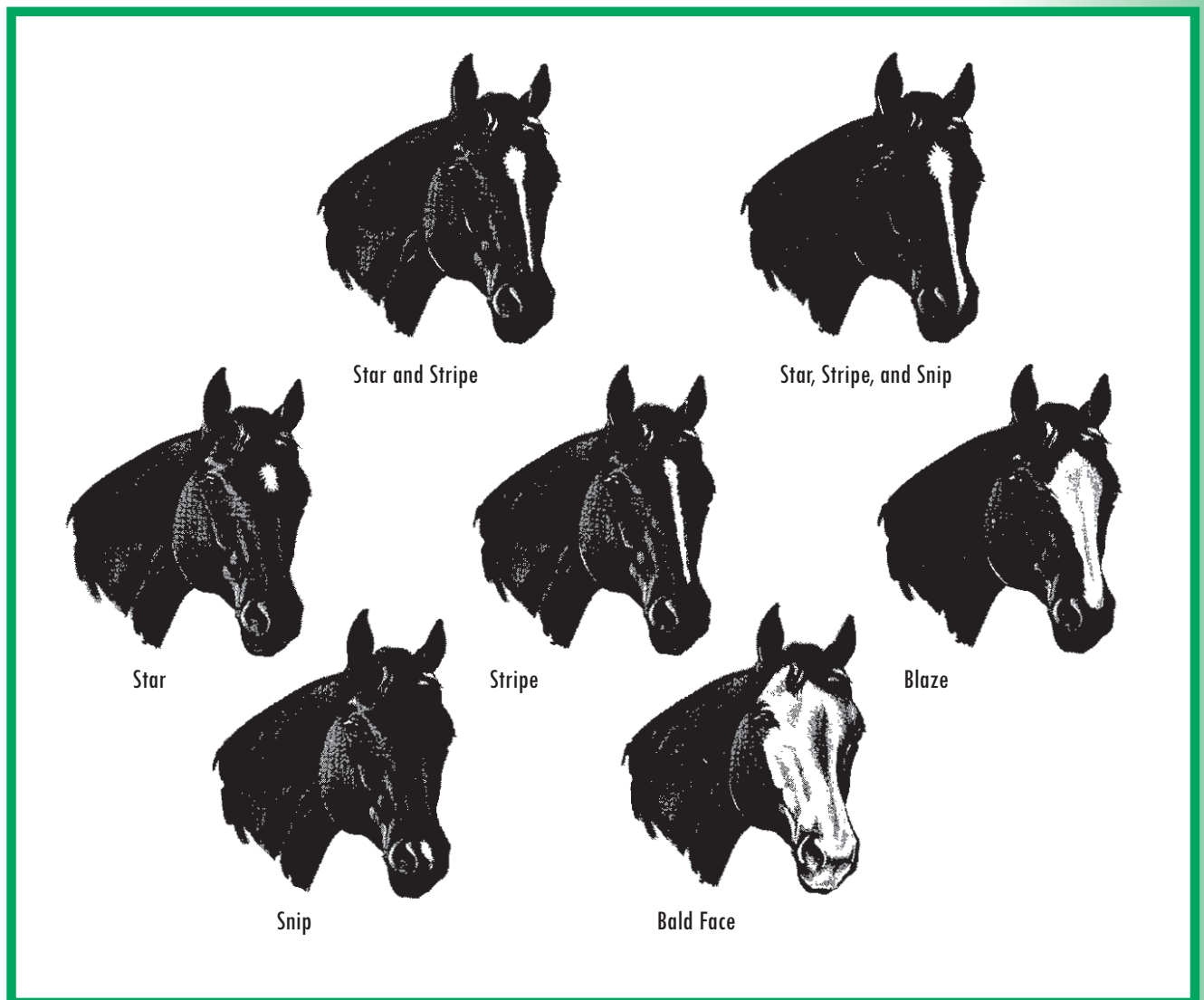
Gray - A gray foal may be born a solid dark color, or it may have a few white hairs mixed with hairs of a basic color. As the horse gets older, more white hairs appear in the coat. As gray horses age, they can become almost solid white. Black horses with the gray gene possessing a higher proportion of black hairs than white

hairs, are referred to as steel gray. Red gray are modifications of the bay color and chestnut grays are modifications of the chestnut (sorrel) color. When small dark colored specks are present, it is called flea-bitten. Grays can also have a dappled color pattern which looks like small white rosettes or bursts of white against a darker charcoal background.

Palomino - The palomino is a golden color, varying from bright copper color to light yellow, with white mane and tail. True Palominos have no dark hair. The breed description lists the ideal color to be that of a “newly minted gold coin.”

Pinto or Paint - A Paint or Pinto horse has a combination of white and any one color (bay, black, brown, chestnut, dun, gray, palomino, grullo, sorrel, buckskin, or roan). The markings can come in any shape or size, and be located anywhere on the horse's body. These horses come in a variety of colors with varying markings, but two specific coat patterns: overo or tobiano.

Roan - The coat of a roan horse carries white hairs intermingled with one or more base colors. They are born



and die the same color. Whether a horse is light roan or dark roan depends on the proportions of white hairs in comparison to the colored. Most roans are combinations of bay, chestnut, or black with white hairs intermingled. They are known, in order, as red, strawberry, or blue roan. The roan coloration is generally not uniform and some patches on the body may be darker than others.

ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

There are a number of modifying adjectives used to further describe horse coat colors. Those listed below will be sufficient to cover most situations.

Black Points - black mane, tail and lower portion of the legs.

Cross - designates the dark line over the withers from side to side.

Dappled - means darker spots are embossed on the coat.

Dark - indicates a predominance of black hair or deep color, with little yellow apparent.

Flea-bitten - a gray having small black or reddish specks or spots on a predominantly white background.

Golden - refers to the sheen which, when the light strikes certain shades of dun, chestnut, and bay, makes them seem translucent and golden.



Coronet

Pastern

Ankle

Half Stocking



Stocking

Outside Heel
White Extending

Outside Heel

Inside Heel

Line-back - means a darker ribbon which goes along the back from the mane to the tail. The line may be almost any color though red and black are most common.

Patched - indicates large roan spots on some base color.

Pure - indicates uniformity, clarity and depth of color.

Ratty - indicates lack of uniformity in color (dull, dirty tone).

Red-speckled - a gray or roan horse having bay or chestnut specks on a predominantly white background.

Smokey - means a bluish tinge to the coloration. It is an obscure tone.

Striped - indicates black stripes or bars on the legs.

Toasted - implies darker patches, dull finish, or dark overcast.

Zebra - always means dark stripes on the legs and/or withers. If the categories of terms listed in this topic are learned and properly used, no one needs to worry about their ability to describe or identify a horse concisely and accurately.

VARIATIONS OF COLOR PATTERNS OF HEAD AND POINTS.

When discussing or describing an individual horse among many, it is necessary to be more explicit than merely using a general color term with a modifying adjective. Instead of just saying a dark sorrel, it may be necessary to say the dark sorrel with the blaze face.

Head

Star - Designates a small, clearly defined area of white hairs on the forehead.

Snip - A small patch of white which runs over the muzzle, often to the lips.

Stripe - A long narrow band of white working from the forehead down toward the muzzle.

Blaze - A wider white stripe down the face.

Bald Face - One which has white over most of the flat surface of the face, often including the eyes and the nostrils, or portions thereof.

Eyes and Face - Normally horses have a rich brown eye with a black pupil, and no white shows around the edge. When this coloration varies, many adjectives are used to distinguish the difference. When the eyeball is clear, some shade between white and blue, the term used is Glass-eyed. If one eye is defective, the horse is referred to as Wall-eyed. In some places, Wall-eyed indicates the white in the face covering the eye region.

Mealy-Mouthed - A horse is one whose color is faded out around the mouth, and is found especially in bays and browns. Occasionally this characteristic is called "mulish" because so many mules are Mealy-mouthed.

Legs

Coronet - A white strip covering the coronet band.

Pastern - White extends from the coronet to and including the pastern.

Ankle - White extends from the coronet to and including the fetlock.

Half Stocking - White extends from the coronet to the middle of the cannon.

Full Stocking - White extends from the coronet to and including the knee or hock.

Mane and Tail

Black points always indicate a dark mane and tail, while white points or light points refer to a light mane and tail.

Flax or flaxen - A straw yellow or dirty white. It is normally caused by a mixture of dark hair in with the white.

Silver - A mane or tail which is white with a few black hairs giving it a silver cast.

True white - Manes and tails having only white hairs.

Rat-tailed - Very sparse hair in the tail.

Broom-tailed or **Bang-tailed** - A heavy, course tail.

HORSE JUDGING: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Action. How a horse moves its feet and legs at a walk, trot, etc.

Canon. The lower leg bone below knee or below hock, and above the fetlock joint.

Chestnuts. The horny growths on inside of horse's leg; also called night eyes.

Coarse. Lacking refinement; rough, harsh appearance.

Conformation. Structure, form, and symmetrical arrangement of parts as applied to a horse.

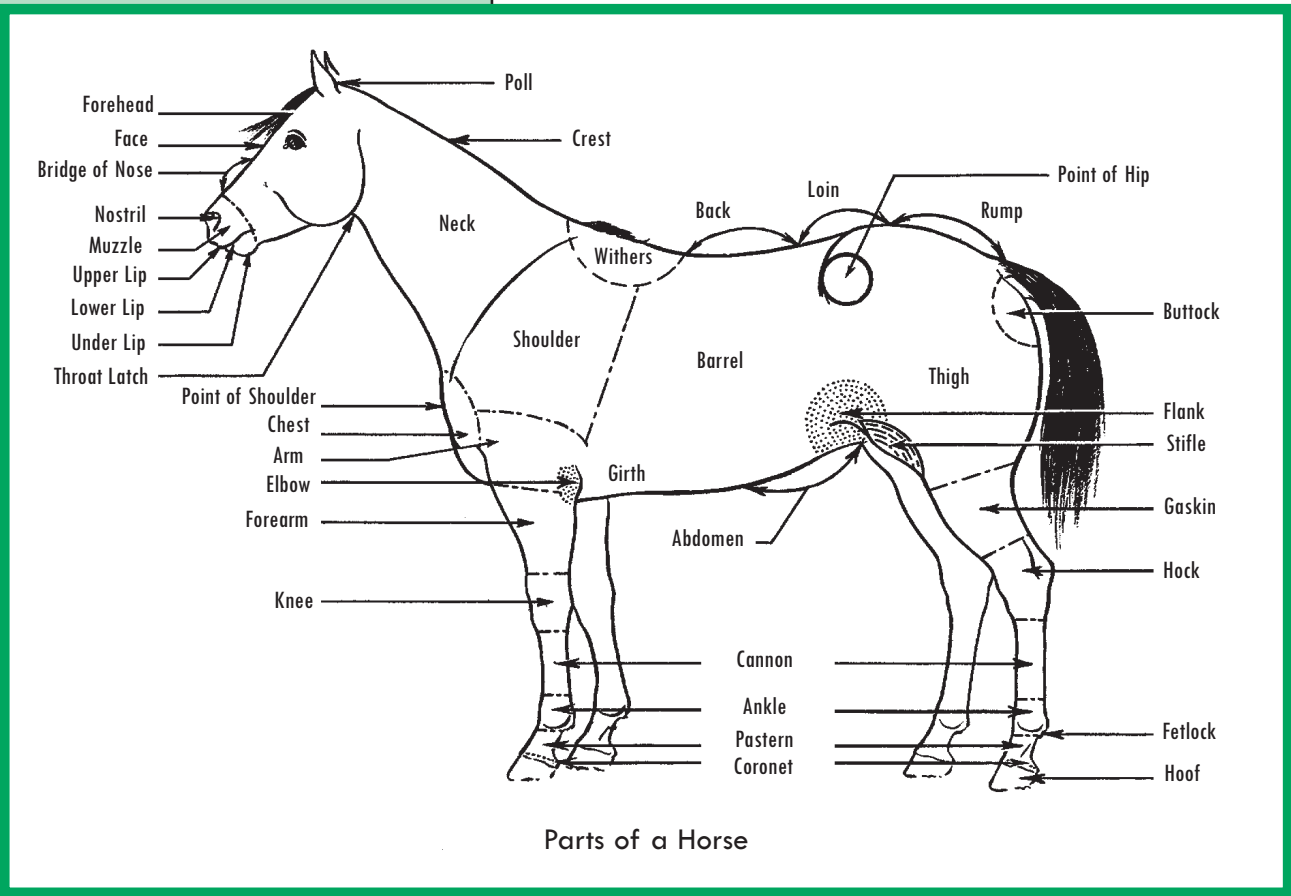
Coon Footed. Long, sloping pasterns throwing fetlocks low.

Judging horses, like all livestock judging, is an art that must be developed through patient study and long practice. A horse judge must:

- Know the parts of a horse and their location
- Know which parts are most important and the most desirable form of each part
- Visualize the ideal horse, perfect in all respects
- Make keen observations of horses and compare them to the ideal
- Weigh the good and bad points of each horse
- Develop a system of examining horses so that important points are not overlooked

CONFORMATION

Conformation includes type, muscling, balance, and structural



Parts of a Horse

Coupling. Region of the lumbar vertebrae, loin, or space between last rib and hip.

smoothness. It also includes the form and proportion of the various parts of the body.

TYPE

Type depends upon the function a horse is to perform. Our study of horse judging will focus on saddle horse type, since saddle horses, or light horses, comprise most of the 4-H projects and judging contests.

Desirable type in a saddle horse requires a horse of medium size and weight, generally ranging in height from 14 to 17 hands and weighing from 900 to 1300 pounds, depending on the breed. This horse has a long, sloping shoulder, a long croup, a fairly short back, and a short, strong coupling. The bottom-line is much longer than the top-line, allowing a long stride. Both fore and rear quarters show an adequate amount of muscling for the breed. The chest is deep and the ribs well-sprung. Legs are clean, flat-boned, and proportional in length.

Horses that do not fit this general description are called off-type. They may be too small (pony-type) or too large and heavy (draft-type).

The several breeds of saddle horses have distinguishing type characteristics (breed type). Usually, all horses in a judging class will be of the same breed. They should be compared as to how well they exhibit breed type.

Muscling

Both the quantity and the quality of muscle are important. Muscles should be distinctly visible on the surface under the skin. The muscles in the arm, forearm, V-muscled chest, stifle, and gaskin should be smooth, long, and well attached. Long, tapering forearm and gaskin muscles that tie well into the knee and hock both inside and outside are preferred to short, “bunchy” muscles.

Balance

A balanced appearance comes from the forequarter and hindquarter appearing to be of nearly equal size and development. They “fit” together well. A heavy-fronted horse that is narrow and shallow in the rear quarter is not balanced, neither is a heavy-quartered horse that is narrow, flat, and shallow in front.

Smoothness

When all the parts of a horse blend together well and the muscling is long and tapering, then the horse has smoothness. The head and the neck should be in proportion, and the neck should blend smoothly into the shoulder. The shoulder and foreribs should fit smoothly together, and the coupling should be short and strong so that the top line is strong and the hips tie in smoothly. A horse with a thin neck and a sharp break at wide, prominent shoulders is not smooth. One with a weak coupling and jutting hips is not smooth, nor is a horse that is extremely “bunchy” in its muscling.

Cow-hocked. Hocks close together, feet wide apart.

Crest. Upper, curved part of neck, peculiar to stallions.

Croup. Part of the back just in front of the base of the tail.

Dropped sole. Downward rotation of toe of coffin bone inside hoof due to chronic founder or laminitis.

Ergot. A horny growth behind fetlock joint.

Ewe-necked. Top profile of neck concave like a female sheep's neck.

Gaskin. The muscular part of the hind leg above the hock.

Goose-rumped. Having short, steep croup.

Paunchy. Too much belly.

Poll. The top of a horse's head just back of the ears.

Quality. Fineness of texture; freedom from coarseness.

Roached back. Thin, sharp, arched back.

Rubberneck. A horse with a very flexible neck, hard to rein.

Sickle-hocked. With a curved, crooked hock when viewed from the side.

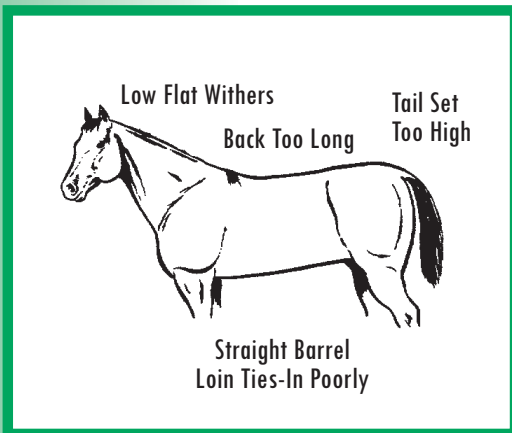
Slab sided. Flat ribbed.

Stargazer. A horse that holds its head too high and its nose out.

Stylish. Having a pleasing, graceful, alert, general appearance.

Thrifty condition. Healthy, active, vigorous.

Undershot. Protruding under jaw.



Head

Each of the light horse breeds requires slightly different characteristics about the head. These should be considered when breed classes are judged. In general, the head should be well proportioned to the rest of the body, refined and clean-cut, with a chiseled appearance. A broad forehead, with great width between the eyes is desired. The face should be straight as compared to convex (Roman nose) or concave (excessive dished).

The eyes, set wide-apart, should be large and clear. The ears should be medium to small in size, set wide, and active. The muzzle should be small, the mouth shallow, and the nostrils large and sensitive. The upper and lower teeth should meet when biting. A contrast is the parrot mouth where the lower jaw is too short.

Neck

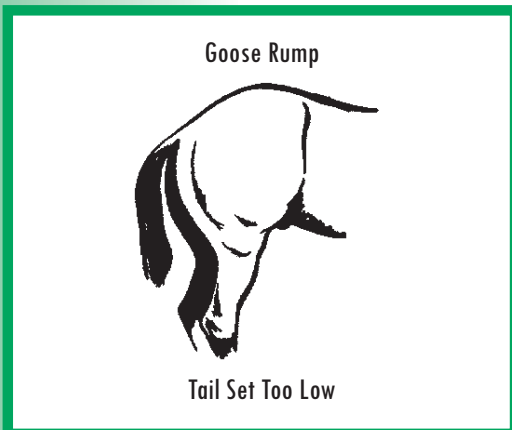
The head should join the neck at about a 45 degree angle with a distinct space between the jawbone and the neck. The throat latch should be clean-cut. Depending on the breed, the neck should be medium in length to fairly long, the head carried either high or at a moderate level. The neck should be slightly arched, lean and muscular, and blend smoothly into the shoulder. A high-arched or heavy-crested neck is undesirable.

Shoulders

The shoulder is long and set at an angle of about 45 degrees from the withers down to the point of the shoulder. Shoulders should be smooth yet well-muscled. The withers should be well-defined, extend well-back beyond the top of the shoulder. Low, flat withers do not hold a saddle well.

Chest and Forelegs

The chest is deep and fairly thick, with this depth and thickness extending back into the barrel. A deep heart girth and well-sprung foreribs give room for good respiratory and digestive capacity. The forelegs are wide-set and blend smoothly into the shoulder. The forearm muscle is large and tapers into the knee when viewed from the back or front. The knee joint should be clean and the pastern medium in length. The pastern and the hoofs are set at about a 45 degree angle to the ground.



Back, Loin, and Croup

The top-line should include a short, strong back and loin, a long, nicely-turned and heavily muscled croup, and a high well-set tail. The loin (coupling) must be short and very strongly muscled because it supports the weight of the saddle and rider, and lifts the forequarters when the horse is in motion.

Rear Quarters

The rear quarters should be thick, deep, and muscled when viewed from the side or rear. This muscling shows in thickness through the thigh, stifle, and gaskin. The hind legs are muscled both inside and out, with the gaskin tied in low into the hock joint. The hocks are wide, deep, and clean.

Bones and Legs

The bones of the legs should be flat, clean, and free from fleshiness and puffiness. The bone should be of adequate strength and substance to support the horse during strenuous performance.

The hock should be large, clean-cut, wide from front to back, and deep. Gaskin muscles should tie-in very strongly and low on the hock. The knee should be wide when viewed from the front, deep, and clean-cut. When viewed from the front or rear the knees and hocks should be bisected by an imaginary vertical line down the center of the legs. Tendons below the knees and hocks appear sharply separated from the canons, giving the leg a flat appearance.

All four legs are set squarely under the body. From the front view, the forelegs are parallel with the feet pointing straight ahead. From the side view, a line drawn perpendicular to the ground should bisect the foreleg all the way from the shoulder to the rear of the hoof.

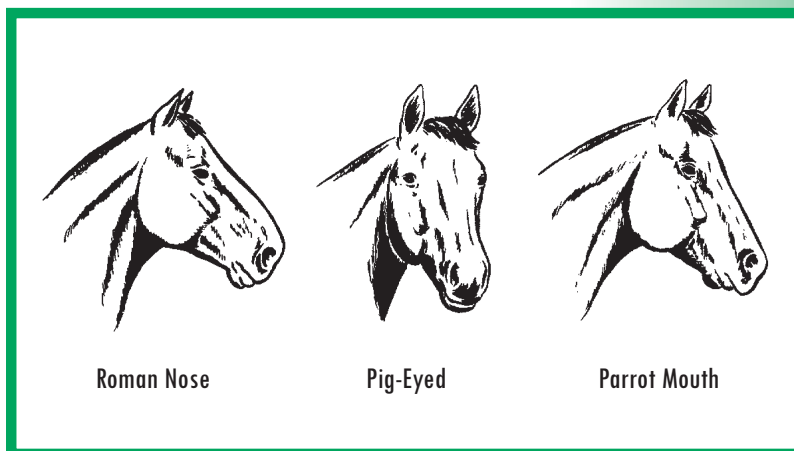
From the rear view, the hocks should point straight back or turn in very slightly. The hind legs should set well under the horse and the feet point straight ahead.

The hock should be set at the correct angle. Too much angle at the hock with the feet set too far under the body is called “sickle-hocked.” Too little angle is called “post-legged.”

Feet and Pasterns

The hoof should be well shaped, roomy and balanced in size with the horse. The heel should be deep, wide, and open. The hoof should appear tough and durable.

The pasterns should be medium in length and 50 degrees in the back, and set at approximately 45 degrees to the ground in front. The hoof should have the same angle as the pastern. If the pastern is too straight, it does not cushion the shock of the foot striking the ground and can lead to serious damage as well as a rough ride.



QUALITY

Quality is indicated by cleanness of the bone and head, general body smoothness, and stylishness. The bone should be clean and hard. The joints, free from fleshiness. The head looks clean-cut and chiseled. The body is smooth and the haircoat glossy. However, a slick fat horse might appear smooth and glossy, and still be of low quality.