Anatomy Terms: Horses

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anatomy TERMS

There is a wealth of jargon used throughout the horse world. This is especially true when discussing equine anatomy. Learning this vocabulary allows you to better understand articles, event language, and what trainers, farriers, veterinarians, and other horse owners are saying. The following list of terms, while in no way comprehensive, contains some of the terms used to discuss horse anatomy.

Ankle: The area that extends from the coronet to and including the fetlock.

Barrel: The area of the horse's body between the forelegs and the loins.

Bars: In the horse's mouth, the fleshy area between the front and back teeth, where the bit rests.

Blemish: A permanent mark or scar made by either an injury or disease. Examples of blemishes include *curbs* and *girth galls.*

Bone: The ratio of the bone to the horse's weight. The measurement of the bone is taken around the leg, just below the knee or hock. This ratio determines the horse's ability to carry weight; therefore, a light-boned horse will be limited a in weight-carrying capacity.

Brand: A mark of identification. A private registered mark burned on cheek, shoulder, or hip. A number burned on upper neck as in army horses. Temporary brands are made by burning a number on the hoof, or painting a mark on the skin with silver nitrate. Brands are now tattooed on the inside of the upper lip to avoid disfiguring the body.

Bug-eyed: Eye protruding: horse usually cannot see well.

Calf-kneed: A conformation fault in which the foreleg is bowed back at the knee. It strains the tendons running down the back of the lower leg and places concussive force on the knee. Also called "Back at the Knee."

Cannon Bone: The long bone of the lower foreleg between the knee and the fetlock. Also called the "shin bone." On the hind leg, the corresponding bone is called the *shank*.

Capped Hocks: Swelling or puffiness on the point of the hock. Can be caused by a blow or injury, or may be caused by a horse lying down repeatedly in a stable with insufficient bedding.

Chestnuts: The horny growths on the inside of the horse's leg, either above the knee or below the hock; also called "night eyes."

Chin Groove: The groove above the lower lip in which the *curb chain* of a *curb bit* lies.

Clean-legged: Without feathering on the lower legs.

Coarse: Lacking refinement; rough, harsh appearance.

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Coffin Bone: Small bone within the hoof. In severe cases of *laminitis*, this bone can detach and rotate, causing extreme lameness. See also *Founder*.

Coon Footed: A conformation fault in which the angle of the pastern becomes more horizontal and the fetlock drops.

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

Cow-hocks: A condition in which the hocks turn in, like those of a cow. Opposite of *bow-hocks.*

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

Croup: The top of the hind quarters, from the point of the hip to the tail.

Defect: Any mark or blemish that impairs usefulness: unsoundness.

Depth of Girth: The measurement from the wither to the elbow. A horse with a generous measurement between these points is said to have a "good depth of girth."

Dipped Back: An unusually hollow back between the withers and the croup. Can occur as a result of old age.

Dished Face: The concave head profile seen in breeds such as the Arabian.

Dock: The bony part of the tail, from which the hair grows.

Docked: Bones of the tail cut in shortening the tail.

Docking: Amputation of the dock for the sake of appearance. (Illegal in the UK)

Ergot: Horny growth at the back of the fetlock joint.

Ewe Neck: Conformation fault in which the neck appears to be "upside down," concave along its upper edge with a consequent bulging of muscles along the lower edge.

Eyes and Face: Normally horses have rich brown eyes with black pupils, and no white shows around the edges. When the eyeball is clear, some shade between white and blue, he is normally termed China-eyed, Glass-eyed, Cotton-eyed, or Blue-eyed. If one eye is defective, he is called a Wall-eye.

Far side: The right side of a horse.

Feathering: Long hair on the lower legs and fetlocks. Abundant on heavy horse breeds.

Fetlock (Joint): The joint between the long cannon bone and the pastern bone.

Flat-footed: When the angle of the foot is noticeably less than 45 degrees.

Flexion: When the horse yields the lower jaw to the bit, with the neck bent at the poll. The term also describes the full bending of the hock joints. Veterinarians perform "flexion tests" when diagnosing lameness.

Flexor Tendon: Tendon at the back of the horse's leg that bends the joint below the knee backward.

Forearm: The upper part of the foreleg, above the knee.

Forelock: The mane between the ears, which hangs forward over the forehead.

Frog: Triangular, rubber pad on the sole of the foot which acts as a shock absorber.

Full Mouth: A six-year-old horse, with all his permanent teeth is said to have a "full mouth."

Galvayne's Groove: Dark line which appears on the upper corner incisor of horses between 8 and 10 years of age. Since it extends downward gradually, it can be used to estimate the age of a horse.

Gaskin: The lower part of the horse's thigh, between the hock and the stifle.

Girth: The circumference of the body measured from behind the withers around the barrel.

Glass Eye: Blue or whitish eye.

Goose-rumped: Pronounced muscular development at the croup seen in some jumping horses. Sometimes called "jumper's bump."

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Haw: A third eyelid or membrane in front of eye which removes foreign bodies from the eye.

Heart Room: Term used to describe a horse's *barrel*. A deep-chested horse with well-sprung ribs is said to have plenty of heart room. Indicates that the horse will have enough heart and lung capacity to stand up to strenuous exercise.

Herring Gutted: Term used to describe a horse with a *barrel* that slopes up sharply behind the girth, like that of a greyhound.

Hindquarters: The part of the horse's body from the rear of the flank to the top of the tail down to the top of the *gaskin.* Also called simply, the *quarters*.

Hock: Joint midway up the hind leg, responsible for providing most of the forward energy of the horse.

Hocks Well Let Down: Term used to indicate a horse that has short *cannon bones (shanks)* which is considered to be a good conformational trait giving the horse strength in the legs. Long cannons, on the other hand, are considered a conformational weakness.

Hoof: The foot, as a whole in horses. The curved covering of horn over the foot.

Horn: Hard, insensitive outer covering of the hoof.

Knock-Kneed: Conformation fault in which the knees point in toward each other.

Laminae: The horny-grooved inside of the hoof.

Lateral Cartilages: Wings of cartilage attached to the coffin bone, within the foot.

Light of Bone: Insufficient bone below the knee to support the horse and rider's body weight without strain. Conformation fault.

Loins: The weakest part of the horses back, lying either side of the vertebrae, just behind the saddle.

Mitbah: Term used to describe the angle of, at which the neck of the Arabian horse joins the head and which gives the characteristic arched set to the neck.

Mutton Withers: Withers that are wide and flat seen in horses such as the Quarter Horse, as opposed to the prominent, bony withers often seen in the Thoroughbred.

Navicular Bone: Small bone within the hoof, fitting horizontally between the second phalanx, or short pastern and the coffin bone.

Nick: The division and resetting of the muscles under the tail to give an artificially high tail carriage. (See also *Set Tail*.)

Open Behind: Conformation fault in which the hocks are far apart, and the feet close together.

Parietal Bones: The bones on the top of the skull.

Parrot Mouth: Overbite in a horse. The top jaw extends forward over the lower jaw.

Pastern: The sloping bone in the foot which connects the hoof to the fetlock.

Paunchy: Too much belly.

Pigeon-toed: Conformation fault in which the feet are turned inward.

Points: External features of the horse making up its conformation.

Poll: The highest point on the top of the horse's head.

Pudgy: Short and thickset.

Quarters: The part of the horse's body from the rear of the flank to the top of the tail down to the top of the gaskin. Also called the hindquarters.

Rat-tailed: A horse having but little hair on its tail.

Ridgling/Rig: Male horse that has retained one testicle within the body. Can cause stallion-like behavior. Treated with surgery.

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Roach Back: Convex curvature of the spine between the withers and the loins. Opposite of *hollow back*.

Rolling: Excessive lateral shoulder motion: characteristic of horses with protruding shoulders.

Roman Nose: The convex facial profile seen in Shires and other heavy breeds.

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

Saddle Marks: White hairs in the saddle area, probably caused by galls.

Scalping: The hairline at top of the forefoot if hindfoot hits toe of forefoot as it breaks over.

Scope: A horse which has scope shows potential and capability for freedom and movement to a special degree.

Set Tail: A tail that has been broken or nicked to produce an artificially high tail carriage.

Shank Bone: Hind cannon bone.

Sickle Hocks: Hocks which are bent, giving the hindleg the shape of a sickle, with the hind legs too far under the body. Although considered a conformation fault, this trait is desired by some reiners as the horse has to almost sit down in some of the reining patterns.

Slab-sided: Narrow ribbed.

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

Stringhalt: Condition characterized by the over-flexion of the hind legs, in which the leg often is jerked up toward the belly at each step.

Suspensory Ligament: Ligaments that run from below the knee or hock to below the fetlock, helping to stabilize the fetlock and prevent over-extension.

Symmetrical: Proper balance or relationship of all parts.

Tied in Below the Knee: Conformation fault in which the circumference of the cannon bone directly below the knee is substantially less than that above the fetlock.

Top Heavy: Overdeveloped (heavy) body in relation to the *substance* of the legs.

Top Line: The line from the back of the withers to the end of the croup.

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

Undershot: A deformity in which the lower jaw projects beyond the upper.

Unsoundness: Term used to describe any condition, or conformation fault that limits the horse's ability to perform his job. May include conditions of the muscles, bones, heart, lungs, or other organs.

Up to Weight: Term used to describe a horse that, by virtue of its size, *substance* and *conformation*, is capable of carrying substantial weight.

Vertical: Used to describe the horse's head set, as in *on the vertical*.

Walleyed: Iris of the eye is light in color.

Weedy: A horse of poor conformation, generally weak in the quarters and shoulders, with long legs.

Well Ribbed-Up: A short, deep, well-rounded body with *well-sprung ribs*.

Well-Sprung Ribs: Long rounded ribs giving ample room for lung expansion, well suited to carrying a saddle.

Winding or Rope-walking: A twisting of the striding leg around in front of supporting leg, which results in contact like that of a rope-walking artist; often occurs in horses with very wide fronts.

Withers: Point at the bottom of the horse's neck from which the horse's height is measured.

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