



## After Show Season

Tina Watkins

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### Show season

The rounds are over, ribbons have been won, memories made; now what? Well, from a body worker's perspective it's time for a serious assessment of your horse. You may be thinking that your horse is feeling fine, "why would I worry about that?". Well it's the small things you will glean from a fall assessment that will give you valuable training information and even stave off a fatigue injury that could be around the corner.

So where to start; first let's step back and view your horse from the front, both sides and the back. What are we looking for? We are looking for bumps, lumps, divots and most of all asymmetry. I am not talking about a quick scan, I am talking about a critical look, moving your eye over the contours of your furry friend and really seeing the tissue and bones beneath the skin.

To do a proper assessment your horse must be standing square on a firm flat surface. Here are some examples of common trouble spots.

### From the front

-Let's look at the height of the ears and eyes. Asymmetry here will give an indication of jaw, poll, and upper neck problems.

-Let's check the neck. Look at the muscling and contour of each side. Less muscle on one side may indicate soft tissue pain or dysfunction in the vertebrae.

- Lets check the pectorals between the front legs. Muscle asymmetry here may indicate overuse due to sternum and/or thorax imbalance and even saddle or girth pain.

-Let's check the height of the knees and fetlocks compared to each other. Imbalance here may indicate the horse weighting one side more than the other, indicating potential leg or joint pain on the side with less weight.

### From the side

-Let's check the curve of the top line. Is there a strong dip behind or in front of wither? Is there a tall peak at top of hips? Any of these may indicate spinal dysfunction's or muscles that have tightened to the point they are holding the spine in a dysfunctional posture.



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-Let's look at the muscle tone, does it look smooth and supple or is it looking tight, with strong lines throughout, indicating spasm or fibrosis that has built up through the busy season.

-Let's look at the stance the horse prefers to stand in. Are the front legs stretched out, potentially indicating the need to rock the weight off the limb? Are the hind legs held way under the body, potentially indicating low back, hip flexor or SI pain?

From the back

-Let's look at the rib spring. Less spring on one side may indicate abdominal or oblique muscle imbalance, or low back pain.

-Let's look at the height of the hip bones. If one is higher or lower, this may indicate pelvis imbalance or muscle spasm that is holding the pelvis in this posture.

-Let's look at the muscling of the large muscle tissue, is it the same thickness, or are you seeing one muscle that is thinner. This may indicate muscle spasm or atrophy.

-Let's look at the way the tail hangs. A tail that is not hanging straight and relaxed indicates a horse that has been overusing the tail to help with balance or compensation for an asymmetry in the lumbar or pelvis.

-Let's look at the height of the hocks and the fetlocks. As with the fore legs this may indicate a horse that is not weighting one side as much as the other.

Though this list is just a starting place for assessment, it will give you a basic overall indication of how your horse has come through show season. Finding some of the above mentioned asymmetry I hope will not only help you to understand what you are feeling when riding but will also help you with your training program. A veterinarian or professional equine body worker would be another team member that should be consulted when these imbalances are found. Not only to rule out bigger issues but to help you with a treatment and therapy program to bring your horse back to balance.

Studies show us that postural imbalance creates fatigue in the body through overuse and compensation. Once tissue is overused and taking more torque, injury potential increases. Fatigued tissue can't take the usual forces and that can spell disaster. My goal as a body worker is



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to stave off injury. Helping clients identify these postural problems allows us to have a performance horse that stands the test of time in a very difficult sport.