



The perfect fit; how to pick the right horse shape for you Sandra Sokoloski

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The perfect fit: How to pick the right shape for you.

So you are in the market for a new horse. Looking for that equine partner that will help you reach your goals and aspirations and be the horse you have always wanted. Stop and think beyond the pedigree, scope and temperament of the horse and look in the mirror. Consider the shape and mobility of your own body. If you have short legs, narrow pelvis or stiff hips, wide barreled horses can make riding a challenging and often uncomfortable experience. Even a shorter horse that is wide behind the shoulders can be difficult to sit on comfortably. If you have any degree of hip pain or degeneration a 'slab-sided' horse is absolutely essential. Having any back or pelvis issues will mean that you need to find the horse that moves with more fluidity and less bounce in its step. As spines age they naturally stiffen and no matter how hard you try or how well you ride, your spine mobility will never match that of a 'springy' horse.

Another factor to consider is the proportion of your lower body vs. upper body. If you have a bigger build in your upper body or have a long back, your balance on the horse is going to be more easily upset. Finding a horse that moves more uphill or has a higher set neck will save you from having as many of those 'precarious' moments. If you have a 'curvier' spine or have upper back or shoulder issues, try to find a horse that is capable of being 'light in the mouth' and has a lighter front end. Holding the reins of a 'heavy horse' or one that has a heavier neck and shoulder, will cause more tension in your own body or will tend to make you look 'slouchy' even when you aren't.

As a physiotherapist I encounter many people who are struggling to be comfortable when they ride or to have better equitation. It is clear that the shape of their horse, no matter how wonderful it is in every other way, is not ideal. If you are aware of how to match your body to that of an equine partner, many of these difficulties can be minimized. Look in the mirror, talk with your coach, consult with a knowledgeable body practitioner and have a great time shopping!