



EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STRAIGHTENING TRAINING

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IS YOUR HORSE STIFF TO ONE SIDE? ARE YOU STRUGGLING WITH THE BEND AND CONTACT ON THAT SAME SIDE? DO YOU HAVE THE FEELING THAT YOU CAN'T SIT STRAIGHT IN THE SADDLE BECAUSE THE SADDLE SLIDES TO ONE SIDE? DOES YOUR HORSE ALWAYS MOVE WITH HIS HINDQUARTERS-IN TO ONE SIDE? OR ARE YOU HAVING DIFFICULTIES CONTROLLING THE OUTSIDE SHOULDER?

Most likely, your horse is crooked. Even more likely, all horses are naturally crooked. Many training problems find their roots in the natural crookedness of the horse. Understanding the natural crookedness of a horse helps to analyze your riding problems and enables you to solve problems at the roots instead of addressing the symptoms.

Straightening your horse will not only solve many training problems, it also prevents your horse from getting injured due to this natural crookedness. Therefore, straightness should always be a point of attention in training any horse regardless the level of training.

In the first part of this series, the rider's seat and position were addressed. In order to advance with this series about the basics of riding, we assume that the rider is able to sit straight and balanced with the weight evenly divided over two seat bones and without influencing the horse negatively.

The dream of every rider "A completely straight horse"

A straight horse is a horse that puts equal pressure on his four legs. The hind legs fall into the print of the front legs and the spine is straight. A straight horse has muscles equally developed on both sides, and has a regular gait. Exercises are just as easy to the

left as to the right. Also, a straight horse accepts the aids and is equally responsive on both sides.

Roots of crookedness

Both horses and humans have an uneven development of the body. Just like humans have an obvious preference side of writing, the body of the horse is naturally more bent to either the left or the right. This bend in the body can lead to uneven hoofs, uneven developed muscles, stress of ligaments and even carrying one hip higher.

Why is every horse naturally crooked?

There has been no proof so far what causes the crookedness in the horse's body but some possible explanations are:

-There are theories that assume that crookedness is due to the position of the fetus in the womb. Other theories suggest that the crookedness develops when foals are trying to eat grass or hay. By standing on one front leg the foal will develop a difference in muscles, which can lead to crookedness. These theories are not scientifically proved but can explain why horses are naturally crooked.

-We do many activities only on the left side of the horse: tacking up, handling, mounting etc. This could lead to an uneven development of the horse's body and might explain the crookedness.

Also, more research is needed to scientifically prove whether more horses are left-bend or right-bend.

The most typical situation

There is a contradiction here; you could get struck by the different approaches.

Below two situations are described, the first situation addresses what most likely happens when you are intensively training your horse. The second situation shows the signs you will notice when walking or trotting your horse on a long rein.

Situation 1

Your horse doesn't like to bend to the left, you will notice that the saddle will slide to the right, your left hip goes up and your right hip slides down. The reason for this is that a right bended horse doesn't want to lower and relax the left side of his back and step under with the left hind. You often see that when you ask your horse to step under with his left hind leg, the stride gets shorter and has less extension forward. You notice that the horse pushes you towards the right side and you collapse in the waist to the left.

The horse puts more weight on his right shoulder and therefore the left hind leg steps in to stay balanced. This looks like the horse is going haunches in to the right.

A right bended horse is not stepping under enough with his left hind leg and the horse makes a smaller stride with this leg. The horse thrusts more than it carries with this left leg.

You feel more pressure on your left rein and it's harder to make a turn to the left than to the right. Your left arm could even get sore from pulling on the left rein.

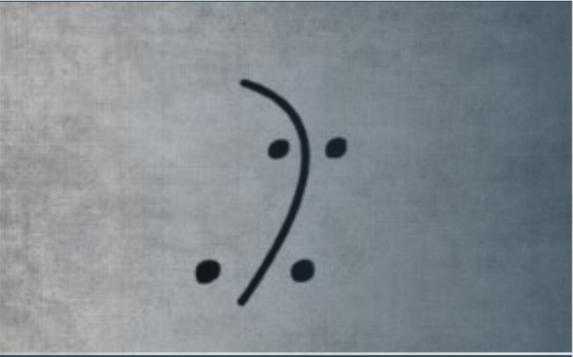
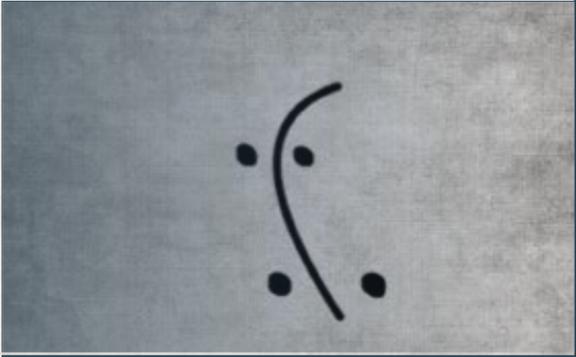
Situation 2:

Is your horse left bended or right bended?

The next images show the crookedness in the horse and what happens mechanically. The horse bends like a banana towards his favourite side.

Note: measure below when walking the horse on a long rein.



LEFT BENDED HORSE	RIGHT BENDED HORSE
	
* The horse easily bends to the left and less easy to the right	* The horse easily bends to the right and less to the left
* The horse feels stronger on the right rein than on the left rein	* The horse feels stronger on the left rein than on the right rein
* The horse turns more easily to the left and not as easily to the right	* The horse turns more easily to the right and not as easily to the left
* The saddle slides to the right	* The saddle slides to the left
* The rider leans more to the right	* The rider leans more to the left
* The horse puts more weight on the right front leg	* The horse puts more weight on the left front leg
* The muscles on the right side are longer and weaker	* The muscles on the left side are longer and weaker
* The horse prefers to lean inwards on a circle to the right rather than bending its body. Or he will over bend himself and the circle becomes much bigger than you planned. The horse tries to keep the left bend and falls on the right shoulder	* The horse prefers to lean inwards on a circle to the left rather than bending its body. Or he will over bend himself and the circle becomes much bigger than you planned. The horse tries to keep the right bend and falls on the left shoulder
* The horse does not easily step under his body with his left hind leg	* The horse does not easily step under his body with his right hind leg

How to straighten your horse?

These three steps help you to straighten your horse. It is a very difficult part of the training so the help of an experienced trainer can be valuable.

1) First, make sure that your own position in the saddle is correct. Your stirrups should be equal in length and you should feel the same pressure on both seat bones.

2) The second step is to learn to feel when your horse lifts up which leg. If you can't recognize this feeling, you can't correct your horse correctly. If you do feel the leg movement you can correct the horse at the correct moment. Over time you will develop more riders' feel and you won't need someone on the ground anymore. It is important that you either have someone next to you or that you can use mirrors to see if your horse is straight. If you don't have a mirror you can consider asking someone to film you and watch it afterwards. This also helps you to monitor your progress.

3) The principle of straightening your horse's spine is putting the forehand in front of the hindquarters. You want to create a situation where you have equal pressure on both reins and

that the horse easily turns and bends. One of the most common mistakes is pulling on the horse's strong rein. This actually enhances the crookedness because the strong rein blocks the hind leg that already makes shorter steps.

4) You want a situation where the horse takes more pressure on the soft side so the horse can become lighter on the stronger side. You can encourage the horse to become lighter on the strong rein by asking the horse to step under with his leg on that same side. Always ask the horse to bend around your leg instead of pulling on the rein.



Exercises

1. A good exercise to help the horse become straighter is leg yielding. This exercise engages the hind legs and you gain control over the front of the horse, in specific the shoulders. You can do this exercise anywhere in the arena and it doesn't necessarily needs to be on a straight line. Leg yielding helps you to get more contact on the rein that the horse doesn't accept so the horse can become lighter on the strong rein.

Leg yielding with a left bend horse to the left is easier because the horse stays nice and straight. On this side the exercise is very useful in straightening your horse because you ask the horse to engage his weaker – right - hind leg. You might notice that in a leg yield to the left, the horse tends to drop the outside shoulder too much and the horse becomes even more crooked if you don't correct the outside shoulder. This is a very good exercise

to learn to control the outside shoulder that might travel out too much. Always be aware of the differences in training effects of leg yields to the left and right for your horse.

2. Shoulder in is also a good exercise to help straighten your horse. In this exercises it is important that the horse places his hind legs under his body. By riding shoulder in you can easily reduce the pressure on your inside rein and increase the pressure on the outside rein. Riding shoulder in is especially useful on the difficult side because you highly encourage the horse to drop the weaker hind leg and to step under.

3. A good way to check if the horse is straight is by using the inside track. The horse doesn't have the support of the track or the rail to stay straight and you can correct with the outside rein when his shoulder is falling out.