

Snippet 2: Hollow & Straightness

Crookedness can be caused by an unsoundness on one side – a crooked saddle, a crooked rider, or the fact that the horse thrusts more effectively with one hand leg than the other.

This picture seems to illustrate “natural crookedness” of a horse. It’s natural asymmetry.



Above: Schematic cross-section in the area of the saddle of a horse that is hollow to the right: The abdominal muscles are stronger on the right while the long back muscle on the left side is very tight. As a result, the horse's trunk shifts to the left, the rider tips to the right. Due to the trunk rotation, the rider has more contact with his leg on the left, which feels to the rider like the stiff side, and less contact on the hollow right side.

All living creatures are asymmetrical. When divided down the length of the body, one side is larger, stronger or even higher – as with our own eyes. This is neither bad nor good. It just IS. There is much beauty in asymmetry such as in flower arranging.

The problem is that crookedness feels uncomfortable to we riders and makes it difficult to “partner” with a horse. Steering is a challenge especially traveling counterclockwise as the inner shoulder and the barrel/torso of the horse fall in away from our line, and the head and neck face out. Traveling clockwise is little better as the rider can hold the horse's head to the right knee and the horse still falls over the outside shoulder and will not turn.

To me, the major fix for natural crookedness is to teach the horse to flex laterally at the poll joint, and to show him how to bend at his “hinge” (the girth groove into which our inside legs fit between the back of the shoulder and the front of the ribs) and thus be able to balance laterally onto both of his outside legs. In “dressage speak” this is called “putting the horse into the outside rein and leg”.

VERY closely related is what we describe as “straightening the horse.” If a horse is balanced onto his outside two legs on a bending line, he is considered to be “straight” on that line because his back feet follow directly behind his front feet. He also is considered to be correctly bent

because his entire spine follows the arc of the curving line. Hopefully the hind legs now are thrusting more equally.