

CONFORMATION & MOVEMENT

CONFORMATION

The head should be in proportion to the rest of the horse. The eyes should be well set on either side of the head and be large clear and shiny. The teeth in the front of the mouth should meet evenly. If the upper teeth protrude over the lower teeth, it is called parrot mouth. If the lower teeth protrude from the upper teeth, it is called sow mouthed or undershot jaw. The nostrils should be large and clear of any excess fatty tissue to enable the horse to breathe properly. Look at how the head is set onto the neck. There should not be a great amount of flesh through the jowl area of the horse. The neck should be as you would expect for the type of work you want the horse to do. A short thicker neck would indicate a lot of power whereas a longer arched neck would indicate elegance. There should be an unbroken curve from the poll to the withers. The shoulder should not appear to have too straight a line at the front of it. A straight shoulder often gives a choppy up and down movement. The whole shoulder should be well muscled without being too heavy in appearance. The front legs should be well muscled through the forearm and a good length of the upper front leg is essential. Knees should be broad and flat with no puffiness or lumps. The leg below the knee should not look like it has a tight pair of socks on and it should be a relatively straight line from the top of the tendon down to the fetlock. The cannon bones should be flat at the front and on the short side is better than longer ones. This ensures that the tendons are short and therefore less likely to damage. The slope of the pastern is important also. Too much slope and the tendons

will be under constant pressure too little slope and the concussive effects on the foot will be very great. The feet must be of good quality. Upright small feet are called “boxy” and are to be avoided as are big flat feet. The angle of the hoof wall should be a continued line from the slope of the pastern. There should be a good quality, clean frog on the underside of the foot, and the bars of the foot should be wide and deep. Look at the horse from the front, if its knees bend inwards or outwards, these are called “knock kneed” and “bow legged” respectively, the horse’s action will suffer and the horse will not move straight. Also look what the feet do, they should stand squarely and evenly on the floor, if the toes point in, “pigeon toed” the horse will probably not move straight as they will not if their toes point out, “splay footed”.

The chest and body should be well proportioned to the rest of the horse. The chest should be deep. The ribs should be well sprung, this is important to provide adequate space for the lungs to expand when exercising hard. The back should be well proportioned. The horse should not appear too long in the body. Horses that appear to be this way are often quite weak over their backs. The underside of the horse should not appear to be herring gutted like that of a greyhound. A young horse may have hind quarters that are higher than the front. This is perfectly fine as horses grow in fits and starts and the front end should catch up. However in an older horse this is undesirable. The hindquarters should be well muscled. The tail should be set on fairly high. If the tail is set on low and the horse has a definite slope from the point of the hip to the tail, this is defined as goose rump. If however the horse has a bump over its pelvis and a well set on tail, this is called jumpers bump and tells you that the horse has probably got a good jump that is well rounded. The thigh muscles on the inside of the legs should be well developed and not make the horse appear to be split up the middle. You are looking for a reasonable amount of length from the point of hip to the

point of hock and again short cannon bones. Hocks should not point towards each other “cow hocked” nor must they be bowed out “sickle hocked”. The hock joint should be large but not fleshy and the line from the point of the hock should be straight. The vertical line below the hock should line up with the rearmost part of the quarters (point of buttock) when the horse is standing squarely. The statements concerning the lower forelimbs of the horse apply equally to the hind limbs.

MOVEMENT

The walk and trot should be checked .The walk should have a four time beat and the strides be of even length. The footprint of the front foot should be studied to see whether the hind foot lands in front of where the front foot has come from. A good walker is a horse that looks like it is going somewhere in a purposeful manner. The walk is a difficult pace to improve, so a horse with a naturally good walk is a bonus. The trot is a two time movement and when there is any extension there should be a moment of suspension between beats. The horse should be trotted towards you so that you can see that it moves straight. A movement where the horse is swinging its legs round from the knee is called dishing. An action that brings the feet close to the legs is called brushing. When the horse is trotted up listen for sounds that indicate forging, you will hear the hind clipping the front. Watch the horse from the side. Look for even strides from both pairs of diagonals and a good ground covering technique. A good horse will flick its toes out without any effort and will use its shoulders, back and hindquarters actively.

Ask the handler to get the horse to step back and to turn the horse around them, making the hind legs cross if possible as these exercises will show any unsoundness.