

PERFORMANCE HORSE DIGEST

A cowboy wearing a brown hat and a blue denim jacket is riding a brown horse, seen from behind. He is holding a lasso in his right hand. The horse is moving through a metal pen filled with several calves. The background is a vast, open field under a clear sky.

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 12

HACKAMORE TRAINING VERTICAL FLEXION AND THE HARD SET

BY AL DUNNING

Steering or Guiding

BY SANDY COLLIER

CLINTON
ANDERSON'S

HELICOPTER *EXERCISE*

BADGER HOLE RANCH

SEE PAGE 3 FOR DETAILS

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Chapter 5: The Front End

An excerpt from Jim Masterson's book, "Beyond Horse Massage"

By Jim Masterson

Technique 1: LATERAL CERVICAL FLEXION Before You Begin

The *Poll-Atlas Junction* is arguably the most important of the three key junctions of the horse's body inasmuch as performance is affected.



5.1 Key Junction 1 - The Poll-Atlas Junction

GOAL: To get lateral movement of the poll, atlas, and the rest of the vertebrae of the neck by asking for movement in a relaxed state.

RESULT: Improved bending and suppleness in the poll and neck, and extension and suspension in the front end. As important: release of tension in the poll and atlas will release tension in the entire body.

WHERE YOU WORK—ANATOMY

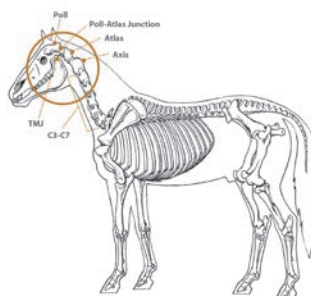
Bones

Poll: For the purposes of this book I refer to the poll as the top of the horse's head (occiput).

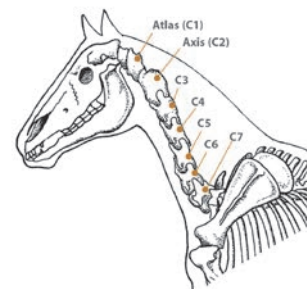
Atlas: The vertebrae of the horse's neck are called the cervical vertebrae. The atlas is the first and most important cervical vertebra, behind the poll (fig. 5.2). It is also referred to as C1. To find the atlas, stand on the left side of the horse's neck and feel behind and to the side of the poll: You will feel and see a hollow space one inch behind the horse's jaw, and just behind that a bony bump or ridge. This ridge is the wing of the atlas.

Axis: The axis is the second cervical vertebra, or C2. From the atlas, slide your fingers a few inches farther down toward the direction of the shoulder and you will feel a flat area. The axis itself cannot ordinarily be felt, but it is located underneath this flat area.

Additional cervical vertebrae (C3, C4, C5, C6, and C7): The cervical vertebrae do not follow the top line of the neck, but run down the lower part of the neck (fig. 5.3). To find them, from the atlas run your fingers down along the thickest part of the neck. You will not feel the axis, but in a few inches you will feel a bump, which is the third vertebra, or C3, then the fourth bump, C4, the fifth, C5, and the sixth, C6. You will probably not feel the seventh, C7, because it is usually underneath the shoulder blade (scapula). If you cannot feel any of these bumps, find a skinnier horse to explore this part of the anatomy.



5.2 The head and neck area



5.3 Cervical vertebrae

You are working to release tension in the soft tissue interconnecting the poll, the cervical vertebrae, and major muscles that attach to these structures. Tension in these important muscles around the poll and atlas affect performance in other parts of the horse's body.

Muscles

Some of the major muscles attached to the neck and poll that affect movement and performance in other areas of the horse are:

Brachiocephalic (brachiocephalicus) or head-to-arm muscles, which are involved in moving the head from side to side, pulling the scapula forward, raising the scapula in collection, and bringing the foreleg forward (see fig. 6.2, p. 64).

Omotransverse (omotransversarius) muscles, which are also involved in raising the scapula and bringing the foreleg forward (again, see fig. 6.2, p. 64).

RELEASING TENSION: THE EFFECTS

Pain and tension anywhere in the horse's body is reflected in the poll. Conversely, when tension accumulates in the poll, things start going wrong in the rest of the body. Some examples:

- Pain in the forelimb or foot can cause tension and pain through the muscles described on p. 34 into the neck and into the muscles of the poll and atlas. Excessive loading or pain in one forelimb can cause more tension and stiffness *on the same side of the neck*, and eventually resistance to bending in that direction. This can also cause pain and resistance to bending *on the same side in the area of the poll*. This can eventually lead to problems with the respective lead and lead changes, overloading the opposite front limb leading to soreness or lameness in that limb as well as the diagonal hind limb and restricted movement in the body overall. Conversely, when pain

and tension accumulates in the poll, the *brachiocephalic* and other muscles connected to the forelimb tighten, thus taking away the ability of these and other muscles to absorb concussion. This puts more stress and strain on the forelimb and foot, which can then lead to injury or lameness, causing more pain in the poll, and so on: a vicious cycle.

- Pain in the saddle area or back can create tension in the area of the top of the poll. Tension through the muscles of the back and top line along the *supraspinous* and *nuchal ligaments* contracts the back and create tension and pain in the poll (fig. 5.4). The same vicious cycle of pain and tension affects the poll and back.

- The *atlas* and *sacrum* are connected. When there is tension on the atlas, there will almost always be tension on the sacrum, and vice versa: tension on the sacrum means tension on the atlas. That's just the way it is. When you release tension on the atlas, you are also releasing tension on the sacrum, and when you work on the sacrum, you are also working on the atlas. How cool is that?

Technique 1 in More Detail

After the *Bladder Meridian Technique*, the Lateral Cervical Flexion Technique is the first step toward releasing tension in the poll and atlas and asking for movement in this area. Starting on the left side:

1. Start by resting your left hand softly on the horse's nose. This "nose hand" is the hand you will use to ask for movement (fig. 5.5).

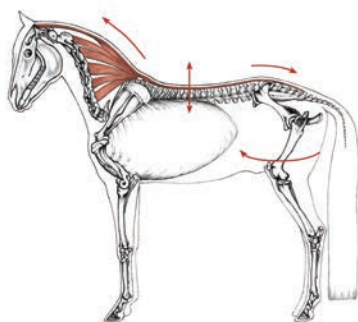


5.5 Ask for gentle movement (wiggle, wiggle) with the "nose hand."

3. Ask for movement. Keeping the left hand softly on the nose, gently ask him to bring his head toward you. When you feel him soften toward you, give his nose a slight wiggle.

Then, keeping his nose in this position with your nose hand, soften both hands, take a small step back toward the horse's shoulder, slide your right hand a few inches farther down the vertebrae of the neck, and again ask him to bring his nose a little farther back toward you, giving the nose a little wiggle. Repeat this on down the horse's neck, stepping back and bringing his head back a little farther each step of the way.

Nose back, wiggle, soften, step back.
Nose back, wiggle, soften, step back.
Nose back, wiggle, soften, step back. Easy!



5.4 The nuchal and supraspinous ligament connection.

2. Position your "neck hand." Then place your palm or the flat of your fingertips of your right hand (the "neck hand") below and behind the wing of the atlas (about 3 or 4 inches below and behind the ear). Use very, very light pressure (*egg yolk*) here. The right hand should not be a pushing point, but a kind of fulcrum around which you are asking the horse to bend and move in a relaxed state (fig. 5.6).



5.6 The "neck hand" is the fulcrum hand. Keep it as soft as possible.

Tips

- Don't worry too much about the exact placement of your hand. As long as the horse is moving the muscles and vertebrae of the neck through his natural range of motion in a general way, you are doing it correctly.

However, one horse will not give you the same range of motion as another.

Except with very stiff or old horses, by the time you have worked your right hand all the way down his neck, the "nose-hand" should have guided the horse's nose to a point in the area of his shoulder.

- Get the horse to work with you. You are circumventing the horse's flight or fight instinct by giving him nothing to brace against. Gently asking the horse to bring any part of the body voluntarily to you will be much more effective than forcefully initiating movement. Asking him to volunteer puts the horse mentally with you, and his nervous system automatically in the "release" mode, rather than the resist or "survival" mode.

The way to get the horse to move with you—meaning to yield to your touch—is for you to soften when you run into resistance. Show him that the path of least resistance is to move with you, not against you. We humans tend to push, hold, or pull when the horse resists what we are asking. We need to resist this instinct and—even though it may seem counterintuitive—release pressure instead. This way you get both the horse's mind and nervous system to work with you instead of bracing against you.

Note: Avoid "clawing" the horse's nose, especially with fingernails. Keep your nose-hand soft and use the flat of your fingers.

- Do a little on one side, and then the other. It's good to alternate side to side if you need to go over an area more than twice in a row. If you go over one area over and over, the horse will start just "going through the motions" rather than releasing. Go back and forth, from side to side. You can tell enough is enough when the horse stops giving you releases.

- Step back and look for signs of release. This is the fun part! Allow the horse to "shake loose" or give any other signs of release such as yawning, licking and chewing, blinking, shifting weight from side to side. When you're not getting the releases you think you should be getting, step back into the corner, and give him a chance to let go.

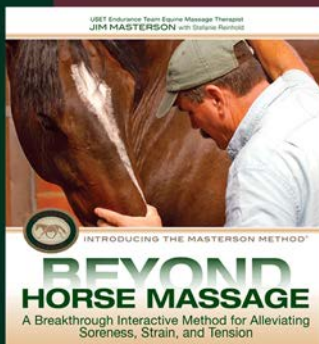
Note: When you step back to see what the horse has to say, step WAY back. Some horses need a lot of space between you before they're comfortable enough to show you the signs of release. We may think that by not touching them we are giving them enough room, but they're thinking "Get OUT of my SPACE, MAN!" in a silent, horse sort of way.

Do you have any equine bodywork questions?
Jim is now offering the opportunity to ask questions for one hour on a free webinar each month entitled: "Talk with Jim." Go to the Calendar page on Jim's website: www.MastersonMethod.com and find out more information on how to participate. December's "Talk with Jim" webinar is December 17th. If you miss this one, we will be archiving them on the Masterson Method website, or join our next "Talk with Jim" on January 21st.

Please See Next Page >

Jim Masterson has been the equine bodywork therapist for the 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 USEF Endurance Teams, and has worked on thousands of performance horses, including competitors in FEI World Cup, Nations Cup, Pan American Cup and the World Equestrian Games. He is the author of the book and DVD Beyond Horse Massage, and DVD Dressage Movements Revealed. He teaches the Masterson Method® of Integrated Equine Performance Bodywork to horse owners and therapists around the world.

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