

PERFORMANCE HORSE DIGEST

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1

SLIDING
STOP. *Step
by Step...*

BY LARRY TROCHA

ALSO FEATURING
articles by

AARON RALSTON, AL DUNNING,
CRAIG CAMERON, DENA KIRKPATRICK,
DICK PIEPER, DR. GETTY, JIM MASTERSON,
LYNN PALM, MARK SHERIDAN, MONTY BRUCE,
PAT PARELLI, SANDY COLLIER,
AND MANY MORE!

**NEW YEAR
NEW HORSE**

BY MARTHA JOSEY

**LIFE IS
Always
Changing**

BY BARBRA SCHULTE

ON THE
COVER

+ PAGES 6-7

PHOTO © FORREST

Weber
QUARTER HORSES

**CAT SANOVA
COWBOY**

Cold Backs, Cinchy-ness, Saddles and Feet

By Jim Masterson

Dear Jim, Can you explain how to deal with “cold back”? I'll be massaging a horse who has a “cold back”, and who is very cinchy - it takes almost a half hour before they can cinch him tight enough to mount the saddle. Thanks.

Hi Thanks,

There are a couple of possibilities for a horse that is Cinchy or Girthy.

a) It could be suffering from a (very) sore back; meaning that when the saddle is cinched up he's reacting to the pressure of the saddle, or b) he could be reacting to pain in the girth area. We can try to narrow down where the soreness is by poking around in a few places, and maybe by taking a look at the horse's history, but we also want to find out what's causing the soreness in in the first place so that we can work to eliminate it.

Of course some horses will overreact to any slight discomfort just because of their personality (we've all come across the drama queens), but even if that is the case it's worthwhile to eliminate the possibility of actual physical discomfort.

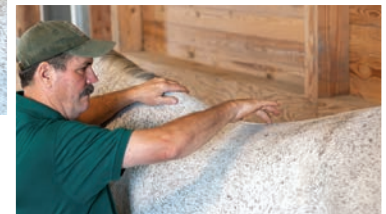
Regarding any unwanted behavior in the horse, the horse always behaves the way it does for a reason. Sometimes the reason is that it's been conditioned (usually by us or someone before us) to react to our behaviors; sometimes it's out of fear or insecurity; sometimes it's reacting to pain or physical discomfort. It might also be that the horse is just feeling energetic, tired, sick, or hormonal at the time; but if you look at it from the point of view that the horse always does what it does for a reason, and you can determine what that reason is, you may be able to change the unwanted behavior.

First let's talk about the possibility that the girthingness is caused by the back. A sore back can be caused by a lot of things, not necessarily the saddle, but if the back is sore you have to look at the possibility that poor saddle fit is the culprit. If it is the saddle, it may be sore from the present saddle, or may have accumulated pain from poorly fitting saddles in the past.

You can determine if your horse's back is sore by palpating for soreness; searching for soreness by dragging the hard tip of your finger or fingers across certain areas of the back, with the intention of finding where the horse may be covering up excessive or abnormal pain. If the horse is sore in an area, as you go over it he will react by tensing the muscle, flinching, dipping away from your finger. In some cases you may have to press pretty hard, or if the horse is very sore you may not, but if you're pressing hard enough the horse will tell you if an area is sore. It may take a little practice to get the feel for this, but palpating the back for soreness is a good habit to get in to.

These areas you will want to palpate are 1) down the middle of the spine from the withers to the croup **82R6916**, 2) where the panels of the saddle sit along each side the spine **82R6918**, and continuing on to the lower back behind the saddle on each side of the spine towards the pelvis. Combined with a saddle fit check, if the reactions show up in areas where the pressure, bridging or twisting occurs, then there's a good chance that these are adversely affecting the horse.

What creates a “cold back” as opposed to a sore back is time. If a saddle continues to create soreness in the back, over time the muscles will atrophy and the back will become stiff, flat and dull to pain. If your horse has a cold



back and is girthy, then the back is probably not the cause of the girthingness.

There can be other causes of sore back besides saddle fit; pain from past injury, such as slipping or falling (this shows up often in the lumbar and sacrolumbar area); unfit and overweight horses (I see a lot of sore backs on overweight horses); and sore front feet (when both feet are sore, the horse will get sore behind the withers in an effort to take weight off of the front end).

Speaking of feet, let's look at the next possible - and even more common - source of girthingness in the horse; pain in the girth area. This area can also be palpated for pain, specifically where the two pectoral muscles run between the front legs, on each side down below the “armpit”. This is where the girth runs underneath and behind the front legs. If you get a pain reaction here on one or both sides, then this could be the cause of the girthingness.

So the next question is, what's causing the soreness there? If the horse is ridden in a western saddle, then it's possible the horse has been over-cinched in the past and some damage done to the muscles here. This is less likely to happen with an English saddle as the girths don't have the leverage of western girths, and have elastic on one or both buckles.

More commonly, pain in this area is an indicator of a sore front foot or feet. If you get a more painful reaction on one side than the other, that points to the possibility of soreness in the foot or lower leg on the same side. If the horse's neck and poll are tight and/or sore on the same side, it's another sign that this might be the case. If you get a reaction on both sides then it's possible that the pain is due to over-cinching, but there is also the possibility that both feet are sore, especially if you have accompanying pain and/or tension in the neck and poll.

Pain that causes girthingness can be eased with bodywork, but if the source of the problem isn't taken care of, then the girthingness will continue to come back. I hope this might help you get to the source of the problem.

Good luck.
Jim

Jim Masterson has been the equine bodywork therapist for the 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 USEF Endurance Teams, and has worked on thousands of horses, including equine athletes competing in FEI World Cup, Pan American and World Equestrian Games competitions. He is the author of the book and DVD *Beyond Horse Massage*, and the DVDs *Equine Massage For Performance Horses* and *Dressage Movements Revealed*. Go to www.mastersonmethod.com for more information.