

PERFORMANCE HORSE DIGEST

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Barrel Racing & Bodywork:

A Winning Combination

By Christie Hebert

From an athletic perspective, barrel racing is one of the most challenging events we can train our horses to do. The horse must be a sprinter- fast off the mark, and not only off the starting line, but off of three barrels as he is finishing a tight turn around them on ground that may or may not be able to hold him. The horse must be able to bend and flex through his neck, shoulders and backs, and lift their ribcage to clear the front legs for maximum extension, the hind end must be powerful and strong, the slight flex in the ever fragile sacro-lumbar area must be able to accommodate the hind legs rapidly pushing forward and then slowing the 30 mph speed of the racing horse as he rates a barrel, only to thrust off again as soon as he is clear. Slips and mis-steps are common, but slowing down to recover is rarely an option- losing even a little momentum in the run could be the difference between a 1st place check and a long and disappointing drive home. Even with the flawless runs, our horses can't help but feel a little wear and tear on their physical structures soon after the end of the race, and this is where the Masterson Method can come to their aid.

A small trip here, or a big slip there during the race can over time cause a noticeable difference in your horses performance. Barrel racers might mention that their horse is suddenly stiff, or lazy, or crazy, or has just plain become untrained. Most likely, the horse was sore from something that happened in the arena and over time learned to use back up muscle groups to avoid the pain he was feeling from the initially injured muscles. This probably could keep him going a little while longer, depending on fitness level and the try of the horse, but eventually, these secondary muscles get used up too - since they not only have their originally assigned job to do, but now they are also having to do the work of the injured muscles as well. When these muscles give out and can't support the structures anymore, then the possibility of serious lameness begins. Sore hocks, sore stifles, sore knees, sore sacro-iliac, sore poll, sore shoulders, the list goes on. Bone chips, fractures, bowed tendons, navicular and ringbone can even at times be traced to faulty mechanics due to the complete failure of the soft tissue structure.



Using basic Masterson Method bodywork techniques I have been able to identify after the race where the horse is sore. Once an area is identified, I can begin releasing the tight tissue structures the horse is protecting. Blood flow can then begin to circulate once more into the restricted area and the potential for damage could be avoided. Instead of having to change your bit, or add a tie-down to your suddenly disobedient, stiff and high-headed horse, you can help him release accumulated soreness and tension, and the horse's body can carry on where it left off, pre-race. The mental state of the horse is equally as important as the physical. Not only will he not have to work in pain - and eventually begin to dread his job - but with the Masterson Method, he will learn to express to you where there is pain, and when he has released it. As a horse lover-first and foremost, and a barrel-racer second, there could never be anything more satisfying.

Christie Hebert has been an AQHA breeder and trainer, and WPRA and NBHA barrel racing competitor for 23 years. Her love of barrel racing has created an equal love for caring for her equine athletes with the best therapies available. She has been a Certified Equine Massage Therapist since 2001 and became a Masterson Method Certified Practitioner in 2012. She currently resides in Wittmann, AZ.

The Masterson Method is a unique method of equine bodywork in which the practitioner recognizes and follows visual responses of the horse to touch to enable the horse to release tension in key junctions of the body that most affect performance. The horse participates in the process by showing the practitioner where tension has accumulated, precisely how much pressure is needed to release it, and when it has been released. The result of this interaction is an effective and easy-to-learn method of bodywork that thousands of horse owners and competitors have used to improve performance, relationship, communication and trust with their horses.

