

Poor Horse Performance?

This article addresses the following main points:

- Question reason for poor horse performance?
- Question rider ability or technique vs. horse stubbornness?
- Consider physical limitation in the horse
- Consult vet for general diagnostics: systemic diseases, or medical, lameness issues.
- If vet rules out above > then consider Physical Therapy

Why? Physical Therapy assesses body movement and reasons for limitation of movement by looking at joint range of motion (ROM), joint mobility, active movement assessment, performance assessment, muscle length measuring, and neurological testing. A Physical Therapist will teach you methods to address the above findings

Often, we ask our horses to perform a maneuver they seem to have difficulty at. We then think maybe it is due to our lack of ability to ask for it properly (rider error or inadequacy) or we think the horse is being stubborn and unwilling to do the maneuver and we think of them as lazy or bullheaded (poor horse performance).

Here is another consideration: maybe the horse truly has a physical limitation minimizing their ability to perform the requested maneuver easily. That can be termed “a block” in which the horse cannot do the maneuver due to physical limitations. Who is to blame there? No one, certainly not the horse. This “block” may come from muscle inflexibility, soft tissue restrictions, joint limitations, pain, areas of weakness, or even more involved problems that warrant veterinarian consult and diagnostics.

In all cases, it is best to start with veterinarian examination and diagnostics. Veterinarians are skilled at ruling in, or ruling out, a variety of systemic diseases, medical conditions and lameness issues. Sometimes vet diagnostics cannot find the source of the block in performance. Nor may the horse present with a specific lameness.

When this is the case, owners should consider a Physical Therapy (PT) evaluation and intervention. PT addresses performance limitations by starting with a thorough examination of the horse. A physical therapist will systematically assess body movements and reasons for limitation of movement by looking at limb range of motion (ROM), joint mobility, conformational biomechanics, active movement assessment, performance assessment, muscle length measuring, and proprioception testing.

If you are struggling with poor performance “blocks” with your horse, consider consulting with both your vet and an equine physical therapist. Utilizing your equine practitioners for the best interventions possible will assist you and your horse towards more efficient performance, along with prevention of potential injuries from muscle imbalances, soft tissue restrictions, weaknesses, and poor movement strategies.

For more information regarding equine physical therapy rehabilitation, go to www.equinerehabservices.com or respond to this email at jenequnept@charter.net, or call 603 566-6561.

Thank you.
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