

BACK INTO THE BREACH



Thank goodness things seem pretty much back as normal for us - we are working away keeping our distance from the clients which is easy with our team approach. The worries and concerns of March and April are receding into a covid mist. Who knows what lies ahead with respect to willingness to spend money on preventative medicine but hopefully we have proved over the years that if you want value for money results, Summerhill Vets are the ones to call.

If owners are unwilling to spend on new horses then the geese they have need to become the swans of their dreams. A few hundred pounds spent could improve the horse a few pounds which translates into lengths at the end of the race and less chance of injury. Good news all round.

Bad backs are where much of our work begins and ends. There is very little skill to palpating the midline of a horse's back. If your horse flinches when you press down the midline of the back with your fingertips he has a bad back and could do with help. He probably will lack muscle on his topline so you can tell even without touching him - especially if he trots in hand with a rigid back like a metal pole. These horses move worse ridden and often have a high head carriage.

They may have **kissing spines** or just soft tissue ligament soreness - the treatment is the same - remove the pain and he or she will use himself and work normally, build a stronger top line and then the muscles will support the back better and the back remains pain free.

Lack of muscle leads to less support for the bones and ligaments of the back so the horse protects those structures by keeping his back rigid and the muscles in spasm so lack of muscle leads to even more lack of muscle and the horse ends up looking like he needs a good meal. Where muscle spasm is a factor we use a muscle relaxant called **Robaxin** which can help some of the more tricky cases turn the corner. The muscles relating to the axis of the horse provide core strength and without core strength the horse moves less like a ballet dancer more like a pensioner after a long drive.

Core strength improves balance, performance, recovery post exercise and hence reduces injuries which are mostly repetitive strain injuries in all types of horses.



I could but I can't list the high profile horses in all spheres who have significant kissing spines - so many that for jump racing I wonder if a slightly rigid back is an advantage as the horse jumps quickly rather than bascouling over his fences. But these cases do need managing to maintain them pain free and maintain their core strength. Results for kissing spine horses don't come without effort.

Sometimes the horse is more sore off midline than on which is often **facet joint pain**. For a year or so now we have been medicating these often with fantastic results. Facet joint pain, like hock and sacroiliac pain upsets horses and these three areas are the common causes of **hanging** in races especially over jumps. You can guarantee a horse that jumps crooked over a fence is hurting somewhere and most of the ones that hang up the run in are running away from pain rather than towards the stables.

If we can't medicate and MOT all the horses then treating those most in need is the priority - those with bad backs, poor action and previous injuries are top of the list especially if the injury was a repetitive strain type injury. Horses with poor topline need help asap when they return to work after a break as work will only make them worse until the back is pain free and starts to build rather than lose muscle.

Most **MOTs** include back treatment usually with some joint medication as a back won't settle and remain pain free if the limbs are out of balance. **Shock wave treatment** is used premedication and fortnightly post medication until the back is well muscled and remains pain free. Some horses with bad kissing spines need maintenance shock waving every 2 to 4 weeks and repeat medication mid season. Shock waving probably works mostly on acupuncture points and is an effective temporary way to reduce back pain - hence it is not allowed within 5 days of racing or an FEI event. This is academic if the horse is on a regular maintenance program with fortnightly or monthly shock waving as needed.

For a more detailed review of **MOTs** please check our website for a repeat of last year's masterpiece August newsletter with some more recent photos and meantime please let us help you help your horses do the best they can for their owners! Flip our new vet has also done a newsletter on facet joint medication for your education which can be found on our website.

Best regards, Buffy

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