

## Is Your Horse Reaching Their Full Potential? The Performance Soundness Checklist: Identifying Axial Skeleton Pain

Subtle issues in the neck, back, and pelvis often masquerade as "behavioral problems" or "training plateaus." Use this checklist to monitor your horse's comfort and performance.

### 1. Under Saddle:

- Resistance to Contact:** Does your horse lean on the bit, get "behind the vertical," or flip their nose when asked for a frame?
- Inconsistent Lead Departures:** Are they suddenly struggling with one lead, or "swapping" behind during a canter?
- The "Cold Back":** Does your horse dip their back or hollow when you first mount?
- Unexplained Spookiness:** Is your normally steady horse suddenly reactive to sights or sounds they used to ignore?
- Loss of Impulsion:** Do you feel like you're "driving with the handbrake on," even after a thorough warm-up?

### 2. Ground Manners:

- Girthiness/Cinchy Behavior:** Do they pin their ears, bite, or cow-kick when the girth is tightened?
- Difficulty with Farrier:** Do they struggle to hold a hind leg up or lean heavily on the farrier? (Often a sign of pelvic/SI discomfort).
- Grooming Sensitivity:** Do they flinch or "sink" when you brush over the loin or along the neck?
- Stiff Lateral Movement:** Do they struggle to bend their neck evenly when being led or asked to do a "carrot stretch"?

### 3. Physical Markers:

- Asymmetrical Muscle Development:** Is one side of the neck or rump noticeably flatter than the other?
- "Hunter's Bump":** Is the point of the croup appearing more prominent or bony?
- Tail Carriage:** Does the tail hang crookedly to one side or feel "clamped" shut?
- Uneven Hoof Wear:** Are the toes of the hind shoes wearing down faster than the front?

---

### Scoring Your Horse

**0 Checks:** Your horse is likely in a good place. Maintain a regular biomechanical evaluation schedule to keep them there.

**1-3 Checks:** These are early warning signs. A baseline diagnostic workup can prevent these "quirks" from becoming career-ending injuries.

**4+ Checks:** Your horse is likely compensating for axial skeleton pain. It is time for a comprehensive "top-down" evaluation. Contact us for a consultation: [info@kineticequinemedicine.com](mailto:info@kineticequinemedicine.com).