



## Q&A FROM A HORSE DENTIST

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### **EVEN BUFFALO BILL CODY HAD A PERSONAL HORSE DENTIST**

#### **QUESTION:**

"Why haven't I heard about horse dentistry before?" R.P. Calgary, AB

"In recent years I've heard a great deal about equine dentistry, is it something new? How long has this kind of dentistry been around? K.B. Weyburn, SK

"My vet told me that horse dentists are 'here today and gone tomorrow' 'today it's a new thing, tomorrow everyone will forget about it,' is this true, how long has horse dentistry been around?" W.C. Elbow, SK

"I've been having my horse floated for as long as I've had her, I've just recently heard about a three-point-balance. How is it that I've not heard about this before?" T.P. Bowden, AB

#### **ANSWER:**



"Mr. W. Vahey is operating on a horse, standing in the foreground is Colonel Cody, the great "Buffalo Bill."

Wanting to know how long horse dentistry's been around is a commonly asked question. I recently ran across this excerpt from a book published in 1929.

"My first experience of horse dentistry, as it should be, was in my early days, with Colonel Cody, the great "Buffalo Bill". Colonel Cody traveled over most of the world with his Wild West Show, and wherever the show went, his horse dentist, P.H. Whelan, always traveled with it. He was, as a matter of fact, a member of the company. My first job in connection with horse dentistry was to hold the horse

during the operation – most big things have a small beginning – and I was so impressed with the American horse dentist – so different to what I had sometimes seen before – that I determined I would take up the profession, and I was under his kindly tuition that I eventually became a horse dentist." [My Opinion on Horses and Horsemanship](#), Major W.E. Lyon, copyright, 1929, Chapter 32, Horse Dentistry.

The earliest horse dentistry documentation I've personally found is a horse dental instrument manufacturing

company by Arnold and Sons located in England, copyright 1819. That makes dentistry 186 years old, an industry now gaining world wide momentum.

Three-point-balance today is the same as what was known by horse dental specialists in the early 1800's when horses were a vital integrated part of daily life. A "float and balance" was considered the proper way to maintain horse's health and teeth. Unfortunately, the horse was turned out and forgotten when they were replaced by the tractor and the automobile; and oil changes became common place instead of a routine dental check up for the horse. It was only after a good many years that pleasure riding developed popularity with those of wealth but the normal chewing pattern of a horse still created sharp points on the edge of their molars due to the unique shape of their teeth becoming "points of pain". When a halter or bridle was introduced, inadvertently the cheeks, tongue and pouchy flesh of a horse's mouth were pushed into these sharp points. The horse would indicate they were in pain by tossing his head, pushing away with their head, pulling back, nosing out through the bit, and becoming difficult to catch, bridle or halter. Unfortunately, a quick scrub on the sides of these "cheek teeth" became what we know today as a "float" but was only a partial answer to many horse related riding problems of the day. Since horse's teeth always grow, sharp edges and new points of pain develop in only a few short months. In recent years, the horse industry has boomed and the demand for professionalism and proficiency in the horse dental field encouraged the development of the equine dental trade. It is through the demand of horseman world wide that a clear understanding of horse dentistry became a requirement.

When practitioners don't perform proper dentistry, they can't explain proper dentistry. It is really that simple. Only in recent years have veterinary schools acknowledged that they needed to rethink horse dental issues. Saskatchewan Veterinary College located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan awarded their first Ph.D. in Equine Dentistry merely a year ago. Whereas in the United States, dentistry had been reintroduced and expanding for over 40 years now, Canada has become rather progressive in their approach and performing cutting edge dentistry with the new and innovative technology that is now available.

I certified from a school in the United States, the school master was the key player and the instrumental factor to revitalizing horse dentistry world wide. After finding a book describing dentistry's theory on three-point-balance coupled by his passion and love for the horse, he set out to develop a school curriculum that would bring back comfort and pleasure to our riding companions.

Even though horse dentistry is a solid and viable business there will always be some practicing that do not perform proper horse dentistry. As with other businesses, we must be diligent and aware of the work being performed. Also, as horse owners, we are the ones responsible for the health and welfare of our Equidae. Educate yourself and continue to make the best decisions according to the facts you've gathered. As you know, horses can't lie, if their teeth are causing them pain or discomfort, he will tell you if you take the time to listen. And if the one performing your horse's dentistry didn't perform it correctly, he'll tell you that too.

All the way back to "Colonel" Buffalo Bill Cody, discerning horse owners have found and held on to the people who properly performed dentistry on their Equidae. So it is today, dentistry is no a fad or something new; but rather proper dentistry has been on this continent for the last 200 years.

Remember, all undesirable actions are compensatory to any point of pain and attributes to a horse's balance. If you are experiencing undesirable behaviors while riding your horse, have a certified equine dentist take a look and get the answer '*straight from your horse's mouth*'.

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If you have a question about your horse's teeth and how they might relate to his health or performance call 1-306-266-2060, 1-403-936-5394, 1-208-420-2701 or e-mail [mackequine@sasktel.net](mailto:mackequine@sasktel.net). Historical reviews have been reprinted with permission of the Academy of Equine Dentistry