



Q&A FROM A HORSE DENTIST

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Proper Dentistry Is Defined Through Balance

Question: *Since I first started reading your column (and had my barrel racing horse's teeth done by a dentist) I have heard more and more talk about dentistry around the arena. The metamorphosis my horse underwent made me a true believer in dentistry for horses. However since my horse has improved so much in such a short period of time, many of my friends ask me what made the difference. Even though I stood by, watched carefully, and clearly saw that there was a significant difference in this dentistry from what I had done before, I still can't explain it. Could you please tell me how to help my friends understand what you mean by balance and how it made it easier for my horse to run?*

The first thing I am inclined to say is that "proper dentistry" is what works, not just "dentistry". Clinically, proper dentistry is attained through bi-lateral symmetry throughout the horse's mouth. All teeth on the same arcade; being at the same angle and the same level; being free of points and protrusions is what allows the horse to move his jaw. In other words, your horse must be able to freely move his jaw side to side and front to back without pain or discomfort. This is what allows him to stretch out and run; collect to rate and turn a barrel; and to get his back end underneath him to stop without running through the end of the arena. Putting a horse into proper balance quite simply is the only manner by which a horse can move freely, comfortably and efficiently in every position you ask of him. Therefore "proper horse dentistry" is beneficial for all horses – everyone from those of you who compete, to those who work on a ranch or casually ride.

More specifically, barrel racing asks a horse to perform a number of specific maneuvers while under a lot of pressure. The mere length of a horse's skull turns his mouth into a complicated geometry lesson and if any one, of the many different angles are incorrect, he would be unable to perform at his best. Quite literally, if a horse is incapable of performing a task comfortably, he will still attempt the task he is trained to do but he would be forced to compensate. Compensating takes more effort, therefore more time to accomplish the same, but your horse will still make every effort to do what you ask of him. Horses I work with prove to me and my clients, time and time again that when their teeth are done properly, only then, can they perform at their best.

Horses are very forgiving, however I would encourage you that once you find a good equine dentist you should never let him go and make certain of their dental certification. The many hours required for dental certification provide the skills necessary to tackle specific angles, protrusions and any other dental problems that may prevent your horse from doing his best.

If you don't have balance in the mouth you can't get it in the feet! Remember, all undesirable actions are compensatory to any point of pain or discomfort. If you are experiencing any of these undesirable behaviors while riding your horse, have a certified equine dentist take a look and get the answer '*straight from your horse's mouth*'.

If you have a question about your horse's teeth and how they might relate to his health or performance call (306) 266-2060 or e-mail your question to mackequine@sasktel.net.