



Ann Bronkhorst

JUMPERS

BY JUDY WARDROPE

W h a t D o Y o u L o o k F o r ?

Asking what to look for in a jumper is a lot like asking what to look for in a vehicle—it depends on the intended use, the level of required performance and the driver.

Functionally Speaking

If you are looking for a truck to pull your horse trailer, the first thing you'll want to know is the size of motor; color and chassis shapes are not major concerns when it comes to function. Next you'll want to know if that power can be transferred effectively without risk of breakdown and then whether the suspension is sturdy enough.

In my clinics, *Improving Your Eye for Functional Conformation*, shopping for a jumper also starts with the motor. The hindquarters of a jumper, his motor, function as a spring, coiling before take off and springing to lift the horse off the ground. The angles of the hindquarters create the jumper's spring.

With top jumpers you should be able to envision an equilateral triangle from the point of hip to point of buttock (ilium bone), from point of buttock to sti-

ple (femur bone) and from stifle to point of hip. (See diagram on next page.) Schuyler Riley says this is something she actively seeks in a jumper. "I look for the equilateral triangle...and I want a long hamstring."

The rest of the jumper's rear angles are formed from the stifle to the hock, from the hock to the fetlock and from the fetlock to the ground.

When viewed from the rear, width from hip to hip is evident in grand prix jumpers, as are closer set hocks and a toeing-out stance behind. In addition to these points, if you look at top jumpers, you'll see stifles well away from the body, or below the level of the sheath on a male horse. This sort of construction aids in scope (the ability to reach upward and stretch across width that all the top riders want), but in order to use that scope and his power, the jumper has to be well coupled.

This brings us to the transmission zone, the lumbosacral joint. If the lumbosacral joint (that slightly raised portion of the croup where a hunter's bump would appear) is directly or nearly directly above the point of hip, that equals

good coupling. If the lumbosacral joint is rearward of the point of hip, the horse will have to compensate and is susceptible to developing a sore back.

Looking at the front end, you'll see different shoulder angles, but all good jumpers have a long, well-angled humerus (the bone that runs from point of shoulder almost to the elbow) that results in a high point of shoulder. (This is why you shouldn't judge the shoulder without considering the humerus.) This construction allows the entire front-end mechanism to clear a jump when the horse rotates his shoulder up and back. A lower point of shoulder limits the ability to clear higher fences. Add a well placed neck (usually quite high) of good length (to aid in balance) and the horse is built to lift its front end easily and stretch over a wide jump.

Next we have the suspension, the legs and feet. (Most horse people can judge straight legs versus crooked ones.) Laura Kraut avoids horses with "leg problems," Rodrigo Pessoa seeks soundness, and John Madden adds, "I want enough bone...and feet are important."

Katie Prudent says, "I look for gen-

erally good conformation and good feet.” Schuyler Riley agrees, “I won’t tolerate bad feet.” Leslie Howard says, “My biggest fear is a bad-footed horse; I don’t like club or uneven feet, but I can live with crooked legs.”

Size Matters

The small rider is mismatched with a large horse, as is the large rider with a small horse. The key is suitability.

Ludger Beerbaum admits that he prefers taller horses because of his stature and length of leg. On the other hand, Leslie Howard prefers 16.3hh or shorter, and says, “I don’t mind small if they have scope.” Rich Fellers says, “I can live with a small horse. I’ve had some good ones in the 15.3 to 16hh range, but it is not my preference.” Michael Whitaker of Great Britain wants them “big enough—no smaller than 16hh.”

Laura Kraut is “partial to about 16.1hh in size, [because] if they are too big, sometimes their stride is hard to manage,” but adds, “Good ones come in all shapes and sizes,” and Will Simpson summarizes, “A small horse has to have enough courage, and a big horse has to be agile.”

Battle of the Breeds

Check the jumper rings at different levels of competition and you will see an assortment of horses of various breeds. At the lower levels, you will see horses not necessarily bred for show jumping, but as the degree of difficulty increases, horses bred specifically for the sport start to dominate.

Rich Fellers says, “I grew up riding a lot of Thoroughbreds off the track,” and the Thoroughbred is still found in the junior and amateur ranks, but the Warmbloods and the Irish Sport Horses seem to excel in the grand prix rings. A closer look at the top horses internationally often reveals a Thoroughbred influence in the Warmbloods and the Irish horses, as lightness and agility have become requirements for today’s courses.

Norman Dello Joio concurs, “Thoroughbred blood never hurts. I think that the style we ride in North America suits that type of horse more than it does the heavier European horses. We can adjust to ride the heavier horses, but I think that our style lends itself more to the other.”

Katie Prudent adds, “I don’t really care what breed. Now in European

horses, certain bloodlines hold true. I love the German Holsteiners, but the horse has to have a lot of blood for energy and desire.”

Running Hot or Cold

Michael Whitaker says, “Today you need more blood, which has more to do with being forward than being Thoroughbred. If they are short of blood, they can’t do the technical courses.” Ian Millar agrees, “They need natural blood; courses are getting faster. They need to have speed and be athletic.”

Leslie Howard and John Madden also talk of blood, preferring hot- or warm-blooded to cold-blooded horses.

Schuyler Riley says, “I’ve had hot and that’s okay,” and Laura Kraut puts it succinctly, “I like more [hot] blood than not.”

In the extreme, Keri Pessoa (formerly Potter) says, “I like them hot and a little bit crazy,

but not stupid. That’s exactly my type of horse and there aren’t a lot like that.”

Despite Keri’s amateur status, hot-blooded horses—those full of fire—are usually too much to handle for most amateur and/or junior riders.

Pro vs. Junior/Amateur Mounts

In general, the junior or amateur mount is consistently easier to ride, both from a temperament perspective and from a technique standpoint. In regards to the latter, professionals can ride the big power jump without being unseated or unbalanced. That doesn’t mean that the non-pro horse should be devoid of scope. They need enough

scope to handle the inconsistent take-off distances more common with less experienced riders.

Leslie Howard has different qualifications for a personal mount and a horse for a student. “For a student, I want the horse to be not quite as careful because careful horses learn to stop if they are ridden poorly. I want a student’s horse to be not as hot, and I’m not wild about them with stallions.”

Argentinian Guillermo Obligado adds, “For myself, scope, rideability and carefulness—a grand prix horse. For an amateur, the horse has to suit the rider and to have them safe on the other side. We may give up carefulness for heart, bravery. The amount of scope and the action over the jump also depend on the rider.”

Rodney Jenkins (from the video *Selecting Hunters & Jumpers*) says, “The match between horse and rider is important.” He goes on to add, “You need consistency in the Junior/Amateur horse—good manners, obedience and a good canter with rhythm.”

John Madden says, “For an amateur or a junior, the value is in the character and temperament—very brave, safe and secure.”

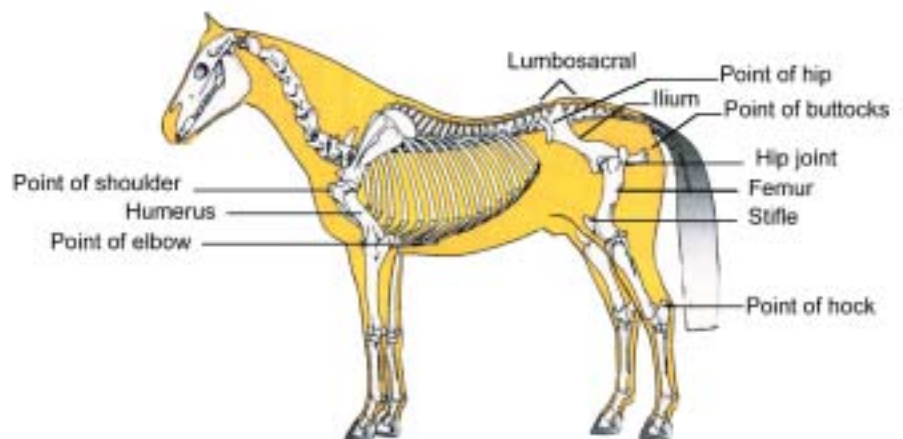
On Either Side of the Fence

For the amateur or junior, a jumping style that is smooth through all the phases—take off, bascule and landing—is the easiest to ride. For international-level riders, technique includes power off the ground, quick lifting of the forehand and a bascule that can include a snap of the back as the horse kicks out the hind legs for extra clearance.

John Madden wants “balance in the way of moving, a solid mover, not the

Opposite: Knowing what to look for makes all the difference.

Below: A customized skeletal diagram pinpoints areas to study.



A Photographic Guide To Conformation by Robert Oliver Photography by Bob Langrish.



Aimee Bronkhorst

hunter definition. I look at how they leave the ground and land; I'm interested if they leave really quickly and powerfully and don't land in a heap. That equals balance."

Will Simpson looks for "a good canter—ground-covering and balanced. I like to see how they land. I want them to land soft and canter away. That's important over the years...for longevity."

Rich Fellers says, "I like horses with good technique that is instinctive. They either have form or they don't; it's an advantage if they have. I've learned to live without all the scope. I could never afford it."

It's all in the Mind

Horses with good dispositions or temperaments—the kind of horse that is willing to forgive rider errors and remain consistent—are paramount for

less experienced or less confident riders, but even the professionals look for a horse with the right attitude. An amateur horse will save you if you make a mistake just as a top jumper will exert that extra

effort to leave a rail intact. An even temperament and a good work ethic are admirable traits in any horse, whether ridden by an accomplished rider or a novice.

"More and more as I get older, I like a good disposition," says Katie Prudent. "For clients, character is important; the horses have to want to do what you ask."

Ludger Beerbaum says, "You don't know [about rideability] until after a bit of training. They have to have mental abilities, to understand what you are teaching, be clever and have courage, heart. When you take them to a show, the interior qualities are more important than the physical - in the end, that

Above: What is good for one, might not be good for the other. Knowing what your needs are is critical when choosing a jumper.

is [what makes] a winner." Canadian Ian Millar looks for the "big occasion horse—a combination of intelligence and sensitivity to the rider." Rodrigo Pessoa wants "intelligence - all the positive aspects, a fast thinker."

Joe Fargis' requirements are "Number 1: very brave. Number 2: extremely careful," and Rich Fellers says, "They have to be naturally careful, allergic to hitting rails. I don't mind if they are a little tough in the mind, [because] they have to be fighters—tough and brave, but it's a fine line."

Markus Fuchs of Switzerland is adamant. "After more than 30 years of showjumping, mentality is the most important. They need the will to do it; they must like the sport." Malin Bayard of Sweden seconds that. "I like them careful and with a good mind...they have to want to do it; you can't force them."

Laura Kraut believes, "They need to have rideability, to be brave but careful and have the desire to win." Leslie Howard agrees that the desire to win is a must, Michael Whitaker believes that honesty and temperament are needed, and five of Schuyler Riley's seven requirements relate to the horse's mind—rideability, carefulness, bravery, heart and character.

John Madden admits, "I look at the eye - intelligent and kind, alert but not crazy," which fits with Katie Prudent's saying. "I've never had or seen a great horse that looked stupid. They look intelligent."

Hugh Graham of Canada says, "Our business is selling horses, so I like a horse with a good temperament that is well trained. They're easy to sell. The market's limited for difficult rides."

Where to Shop

Norman Dello Joio says, "It's not like there's herds of good jumpers running around anywhere. There's an odd one here or there that comes up. The world has gotten so small that I travel all over South America and Europe, [and] sometimes I miss things in my own backyard because of that. We forget to look at home."

Apparently a good horse is a good horse no matter where you find it. And a good horse is one that suits you and your goals. ■

Judy Wardrobe has been involved with horses in a hands-on capacity for 35 years. She writes for numerous magazines internationally and provides pedigree information for TV commentators. Judy can be reached at jwequine@telusplanet.net.