

Hunter or Jumper?

by Judy Wardrope

In past articles, we have seen that in order to be good at a particular sport, a horse has to be built to do that particular sport. As discussed here in previous issues, a strong lumbosacral placement, stifles well below the level of the sheath and the appearance of an equilateral triangle (point of hip, point of buttock, stifle and back to point of hip) are the determining factors in the hindquarters of a top show jumper. These qualities would not be detrimental to a show hunter – particularly the 4' hunters – yet they are not essential. Why? And what are the structural differences between hunters and jumpers?

In order to determine the differences between hunters and jumpers, we need to remember that when assessing the forequarters, we need to view the scapula, humerus and radius as one apparatus; since these parts cannot move independently.

A good show jumper (high amateur and grand prix) has to possess desirable characteristics of the forequarters as well, including lightness in front of the pillar of support, a scapula/humerus/radius configuration that allows good lift of the forelegs and a neck of sufficient length to use as a counterbalance. Hunters, on the other hand, have to lift their forelegs in a particular way – hunter form.

The horse in photo #1 displays excellent forequarters for show jumping even though his scapula is not nearly as sloping as the horse in photo #3. He is not heavy in front of his pillar of support (straight up through the middle of his foreleg.). When he rolls his scapula back, his point of shoulder (which is already high) will rise, his elbow will move forward and his knees will be high (and his hooves will be close to his elbow), allowing him to clear high and wide obstacles with relative ease.

Evaluating show hunters is not quite as definitive as evaluating show



jumpers. One reason is that there are several different kinds of show hunters: hunters on the flat, hunters over fences, low hunters, high hunters and so on. Another reason is that there are several different configurations that can produce the desired hunter movement or form.

As one would expect, the closer the hindquarters are to those of a show jumper, the better the scope of the hunter, and, the heavier he is over his pillar of support the more important a strong lumbosacral placement becomes. The forequarters of successful show hunters vary considerably as the horses in photo #2 and photo #3 illustrate, but the resulting movements can be similar.

The horse in photo #2 is heavier in front of his pillar of support (yes, he has a strong LS) and his point of shoulder is much lower. But if we think of the scapula/humerus/radius configuration as one apparatus, we can see that horse #2 and horse #3 will each possess hunter movement and hunter form.

When horse #2 rolls his scapula back, his point of shoulder will not be very high. Consequently, his knees will not be high and his feet will not be very far off the ground when travelling on the

flat, and, when going over a fence, his knees will not come nearly as high as the horse in photo #1. He has no choice in how he will move on the flat and what his form will be over a fence. He has to move like a hunter and is not built to move like a jumper.

Horse #3 can be deceiving at first glance. We might think that he will be more like horse #1 than horse #2 because he has a sloping scapula and jumper traits like a high point of shoulder and is light in front of his pillar of support. So why is he a champion hunter? If we look at the scapula/humerus/radius configuration as independent sections, we can be fooled, but when we look at them as one apparatus we get an accurate picture of how this horse will move on the flat and over fences. Unlike the other two horses, horse #3 will not be able to roll his scapula as far back because, if you look carefully at the configuration, it would have nowhere to go. As a result, his point of shoulder can't rise much above its standing position, and his knees will not rise above what is desired for hunter movement or hunter form. 

For a refresher course on the basics of conformation visit the Horse Sport section of the www.horse-canada.com website.