

Body Condition Scores

The Henneke System

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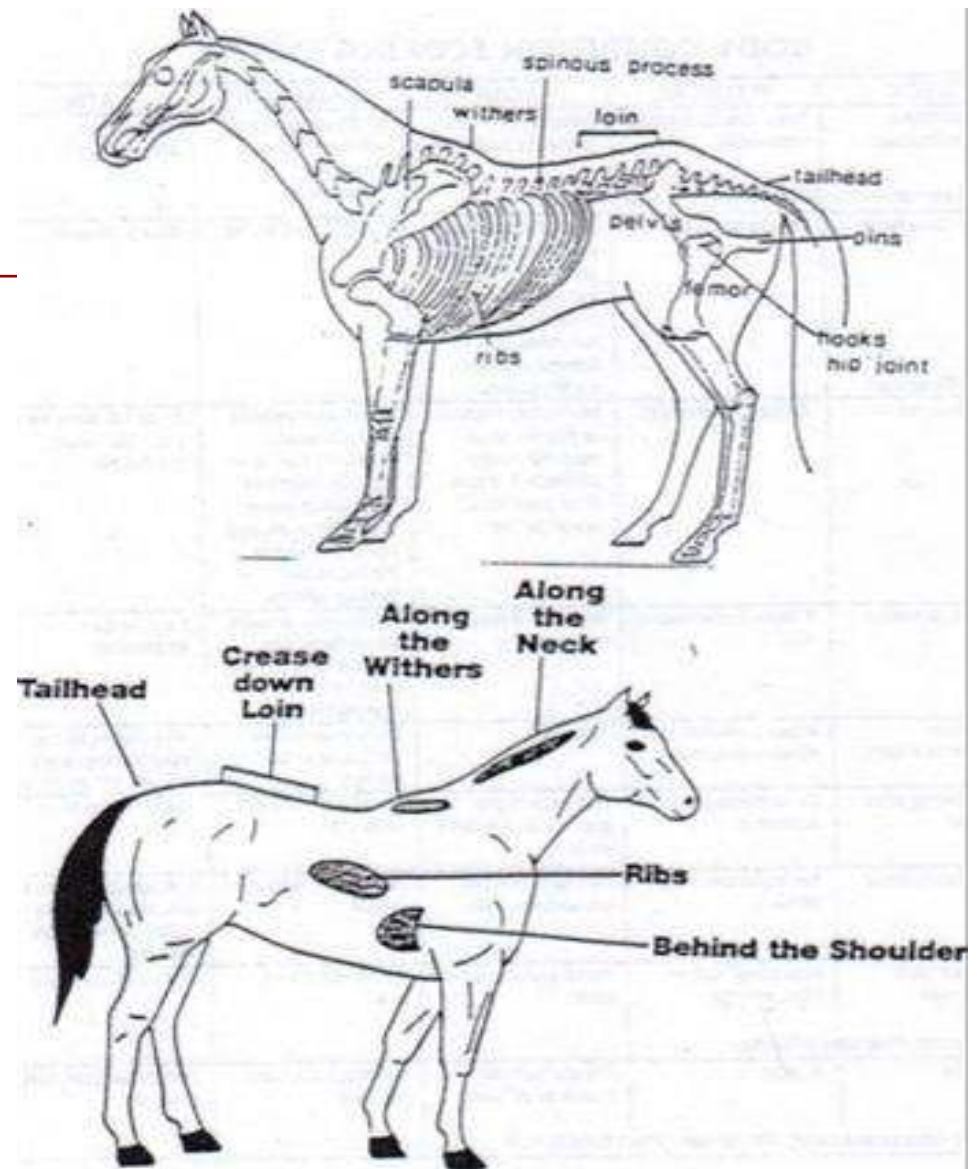
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The Henneke System

- The Henneke System was developed by Don R. Henneke, PhD of Tarleton State University in Texas in 1983.
- The Henneke System is a consistent method of objective evaluation of a horse's body condition based on visual and palpable fat cover over set points on a horse.

Points of Evaluation

- The six points on horses that are most responsive to changes in body fat were located as reference points.
- These points are: the lumbar spinous processes (loin), ribs, tail head, area behind the shoulder, crest of the neck, and the withers.



Getting an Accurate Body Score

Condition	Neck	Withers	Shoulder	Ribs	Loin	Tailhead
1 Poor	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Ribs protruding prominently	Spinous processes projecting prominently	Tailhead, pinbones, and hook bones projecting prominently
2 Very Thin	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Ribs prominent	Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes. Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous processes are prominent	Tailhead prominent
3 Thin	Neck accentuated	Withers accentuated	Shoulder accentuated	Slight fat over ribs. Ribs easily discernible	Fat buildup halfway on spinous processes, but easily discernible. Transverse processes cannot be felt	Tailhead prominent but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified. Hook bones appear rounded, but are still easily discernible. Pin bones not distinguishable
4 Moderately Thin	Neck not obviously thin	Withers not obviously thin	Shoulder not obviously thin	Faint outline of ribs discernible	Negative crease (peaked appearance) along back	Prominence depends on conformation. Fat can be felt. Hook bones not discernible
5 Moderate (Ideal Weight)	Neck blends smoothly into body	Withers rounded over spinous processes	Shoulder blends smoothly into body	Ribs cannot be visually distinguished, but can be easily felt	Back is level	Fat around tailhead beginning to feel soft
6 Moderately Fleishy	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat over ribs feels spongy	May have a slight positive crease (a groove) down back	Fat around tailhead feels soft
7 Fleishy	Fat deposited along neck	Fat deposited along withers	Fat deposited behind shoulder	Individual ribs can be felt with pressure, but noticeable fat filling between ribs	May have a positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead is soft
8 Fat	Noticeable thickening of neck	Area along withers filled with fat	Area behind shoulder filled in flush with body	Difficult to feel ribs	Positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead very soft
9 Extremely Fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Patchy fat appearing over ribs	Obvious crease down the back	Bulging fat around tailhead

- Using the chart shown to the left, a score of 1-9 is given to each point of reference, usually in $\frac{1}{4}$ increments.
- These scores are added together and averaged into the accurate body condition score for that horse.
- A body score of 1 has no apparent fat cover, a 5-7 is the average pleasure horse, and a 9 is an obese animal.

Body Score Evaluations



- When evaluating body condition, only look at the reference points for an accurate score. Large bellies are deceiving as exemplified by this mare that is a body score of 2.5 but is heavy in foal.

Conformation Effects



- Conformation differences such as a sway back make certain criteria within each score difficult to apply to every horse. In these instances, those areas influenced by conformation should be discounted, but not ignored.

Basis for Inspections and Impoundments

- As a basis for inspections for the Humane Care for Equine, the Georgia Department of Agriculture recognizes a body score of 4 as acceptable, body scores of 5-7 as ideal, and horses with a body score of less than 4 to be too thin and less than 3 to be impoundable due to lack of food.
- Horses with body scores of greater than 7 are evaluated for dangers associated with an obese horse such as laminitis.

Body Score of 1- Emaciated



- The horse is emaciated, with prominent spinous processes, tail head, pelvic bones and ribs; the bone structure under the withers, shoulders, and neck can be seen and no fat cover can be felt anywhere.

Body Score of 1



- Neck bone structure is easily noticeable.
- Tail head, hook bones, and pin bones are projecting prominently.



Body Score 1

- Ribs project prominently.
- Tail head, tuber coxae (hip joints), and ischia (lower pelvic bones) project prominently.
- Individual vertebrae can be seen.
- A body score of one is considered to be in critical condition.

Body Score of 2 – Very Thin

- Withers are discernable.
- Spinous processes are prominent.
- Slight fat cover over transverse processes, but “shelf” is defined.
- Ribs are prominent.
- Hook and pin bones are still projected.



Body Score of 2

- Withers are discernable.
- Neck is faintly discernable.
- Shoulder is discernable.
- Tail head is prominent with individual vertebrae still visible.



Body Score 2+



- Shoulder is discernable.
- Shelf is starting.
- Ribs are prominent.
- Hook bones are easily seen, pin bones are starting.

Body Score 3- Thin



- Fat buildup halfway up spinous processes, but backbone still visible.
- Tail head prominent but individual vertebrae not identified.
- Hook bones visible but appear rounded. Pin bones do not project.
- Ribs visible but have fat deposits between them.

Body Score 3 - Not an adequate amount of body fat for the horse to be healthy.



- Shoulder accentuated.
- Ribs visible.
- Backbone discernable, but individual vertebrae not identified.
- Hook bones visible, but rounded, pin bones not discernable.

Body Score of 4 – Moderately Thin

- Withers not obviously thin.
- Negative crease along back, but vertebrae not visible.
- Faint outline of ribs discernable.
- Shoulder not obviously thin.
- Hook bones are rounded.



Body Score 4 — This is the minimum acceptable amount of body fat but not enough for the horse to handle illness or extreme stress.

- Neck not obviously thin.
- Negative crease along back.
- Fat deposits around tail head.
- Hip joints not discernable.



Body Score 5 - Moderate



- Fat around tail head begins to feel spongy.
- Ribs cannot be visually distinguished but can be easily felt.
- Shoulder blends smoothly into body.

Body Score 5 – Horse has a blended, smooth, overall appearance. The average performance horse will score in this range.



- Neck blends smoothly into body.
- Withers are rounded over spinous processes.
- Back is level.

Body Score 6 – Moderately Fleshy

- Fat being deposited along neck and withers.
- Fat around tail head is soft.
- Fat cover over ribs is spongy.



Body Score 6 – The average pleasure horse will score in this range.

- May have slight positive crease along back.
- Fat deposits felt at the withers, behind the shoulders, and on the sides of the neck.



Body Score 7 - Fleshy

- Fat deposited along neck, withers, and shoulder.
- Fat is soft around tail head.
- Starting a positive crease along back.
- Fat deposited between ribs.



Body Score 7 – Top end of Ideal Body Condition



Body Score 8 - Fat

- Noticeable thickening of neck.
- Area along withers filled with fat.
- Positive crease along back.
- Tail head fat very soft.
- Difficult to feel ribs.
- Area behind shoulder filled in flush with body.
- Fat deposited along inner buttocks.



Body Score 9 – Extremely Fat – The horse will be so fat that it will lose all definition of muscle and contours.

- Bulging fat along neck, withers, and shoulder.
- Obvious positive crease down back.
- Building fat around tail head.
- Patchy fat over ribs.
- Flanks filled in flush.
- Fat along inner buttocks rub together.



Points to Note

- When a horse has a long hair coat it is imperative that you score using a hands on evaluation.
- Aged horses will have decreased body scores because there is a softening in their muscle structure. Add half a score.
- Pregnant mares in the last trimester will have decreased scores. The weight of the foal pulls down her loin area decreasing that score and the hormones necessary for delivery will make her tail head area flaccid, decreasing that score. Add on a half a score to her overall score.

Points to Note

- Thoroughbred conformation has naturally more prominent withers and back than some other breeds and therefore will naturally score one half score less.
- Pony and draft breeds conformation is naturally fleshy and will score one half score higher.



The End

