

SO YOU WANT TO BE A HORSE JUDGE



An attractive, impressive horse, large, well set eyes, wide forehead, large nostrils and alert ears.

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Introduction

There is a saying in the equine arena that a top horse-judge is born, not made. Since there are more sidewalk opinions regarding judging horses than there are about most subjects, anyone making such a bold statement is treading on boggy ground. The natural ability to accurately judge horses is given to few people, but even natural ability can be greatly improved through study and training under an experienced horse judge.

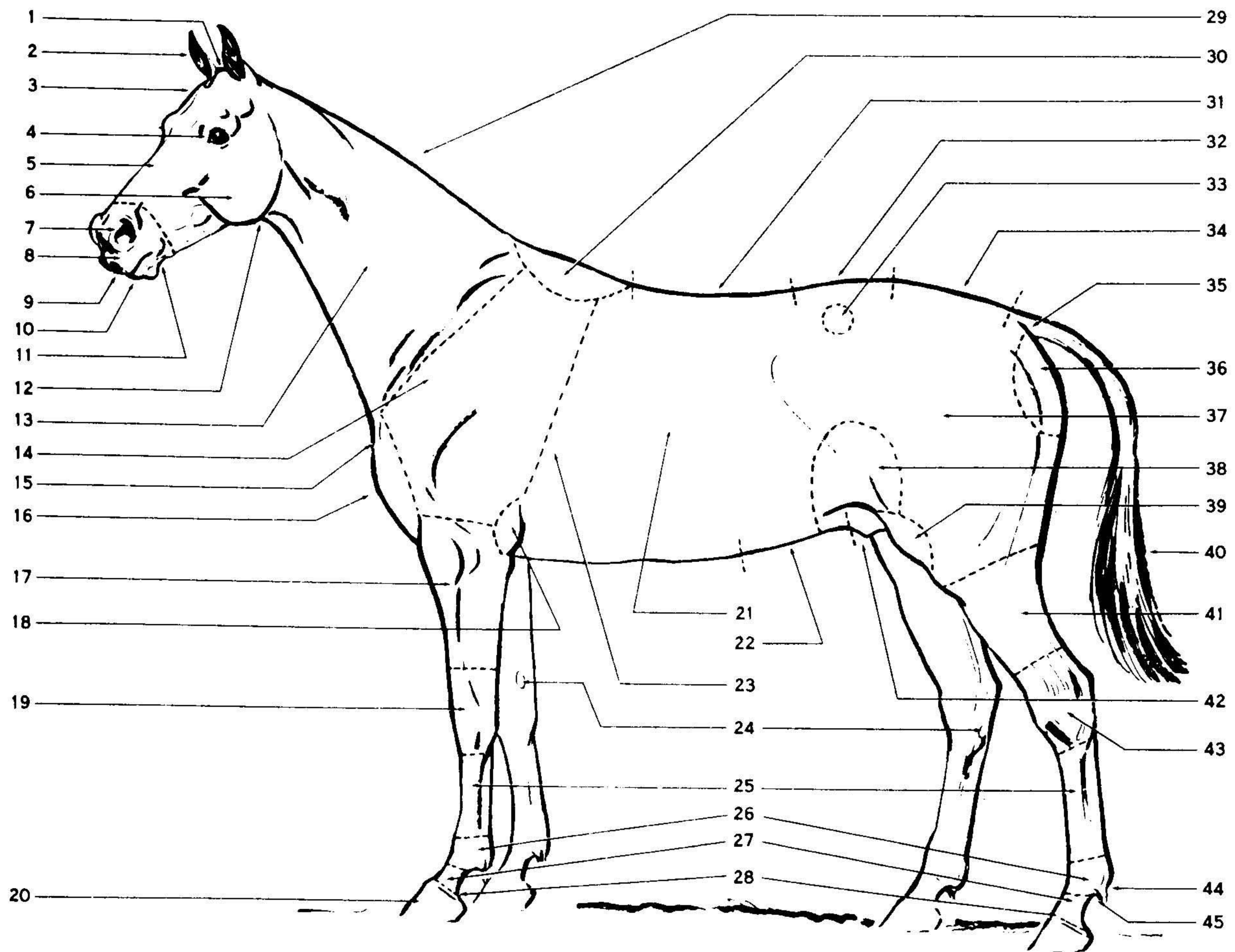
Learning to accurately judge horses is a fascinating study. People having an inborn love and interest in horses usually make the best judges, but good judging also requires accurate observation and an excellent memory. The serious would-be judge must first memorize the names of the exterior parts of the horse (fig. 1) and should then work with an experienced judge. Formal training in judging at some university or state college is highly desirable, and observing capable judges at fairs and horse shows is a "must".

One should develop a mental picture of the conformation of an ideal horse (fig. 2). The ability to judge horses will be improved if the student practices comparing this ideal imaginary animal with each horse he sees.

Division of Agricultural Sciences
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| 1. POLL | 16. CHEST | 31. BACK |
| 2. EAR | 17. FOREARM | 32. LOIN |
| 3. FOREHEAD | 18. ELBOW | 33. POINT OF HIP |
| 4. EYE | 19. KNEE | 34. RUMP OR CROUP |
| 5. FACE | 20. HOOF | 35. DOCK |
| 6. CHEEK | 21. BARREL | 36. BUTTOCK |
| 7. NOSTRIL | 22. ABDOMEN | 37. THIGH |
| 8. MUZZLE | 23. HEART GIRTH | 38. FLANK |
| 9. UPPER LIP | 24. CHESTNUT | 39. STIFLE |
| 10. LOWER LIP | 25. CANNON | 40. TAIL |
| 11. CHIN GROOVE | 26. FETLOCK JOINT | 41. GASKIN OR SECOND THIGH |
| 12. THROAT LATCH | 27. PASTERN | 42. SHEATH |
| 13. NECK | 28. CORONET | 43. HOCK |
| 14. SHOULDER | 29. CREST | 44. FETLOCK |
| 15. POINT OF SHOULDER | 30. WITHERS | 45. ERGOT |

Fig. 1. Parts of the horse.

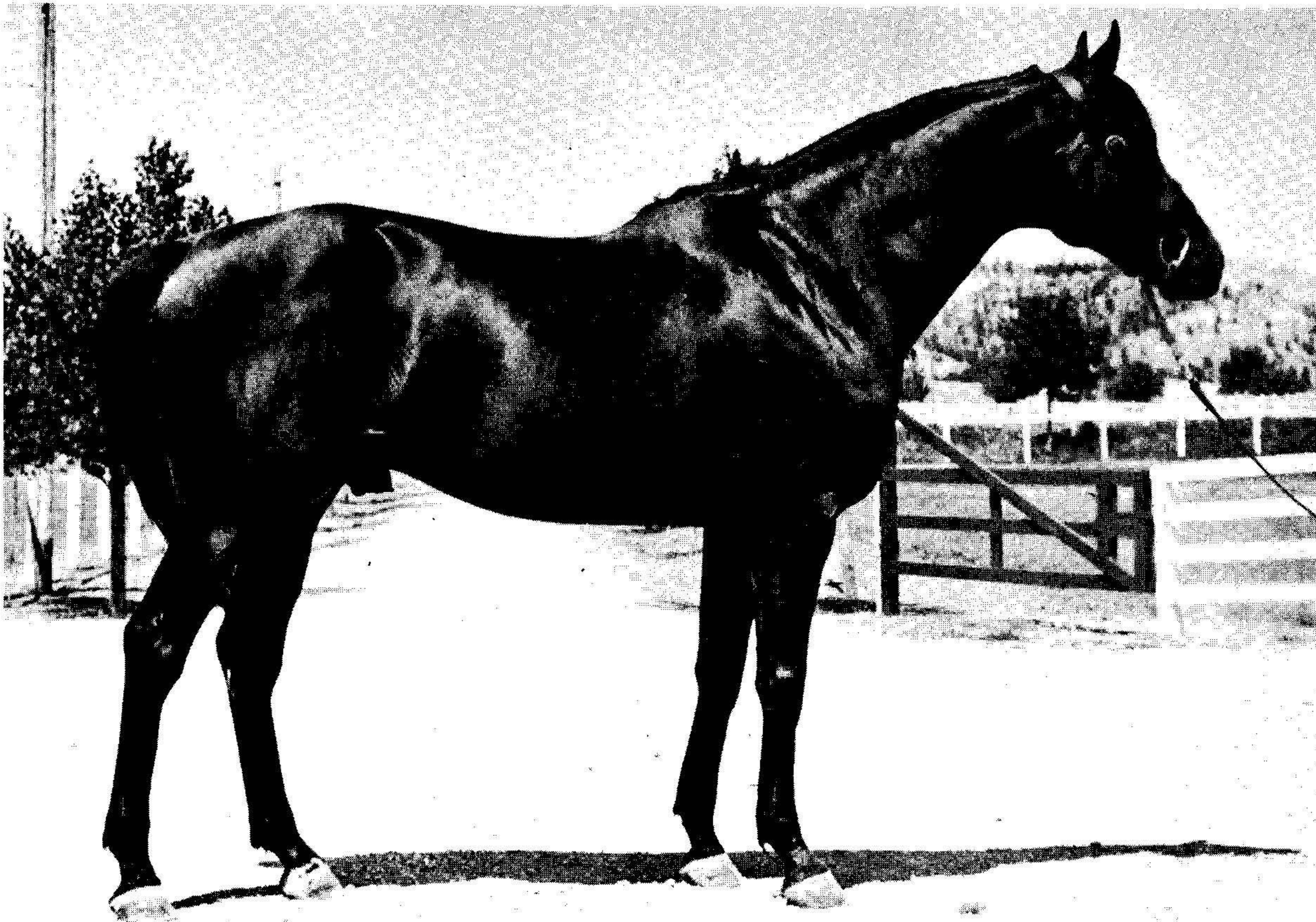


Fig. 2. Morse Code, a Thoroughbred stallion with excellent conformation, weighed 1,200 pounds and was 15 hands 2 inches high, with a heart girth of 75 inches and a cannon bone 8¼ inches in diameter.

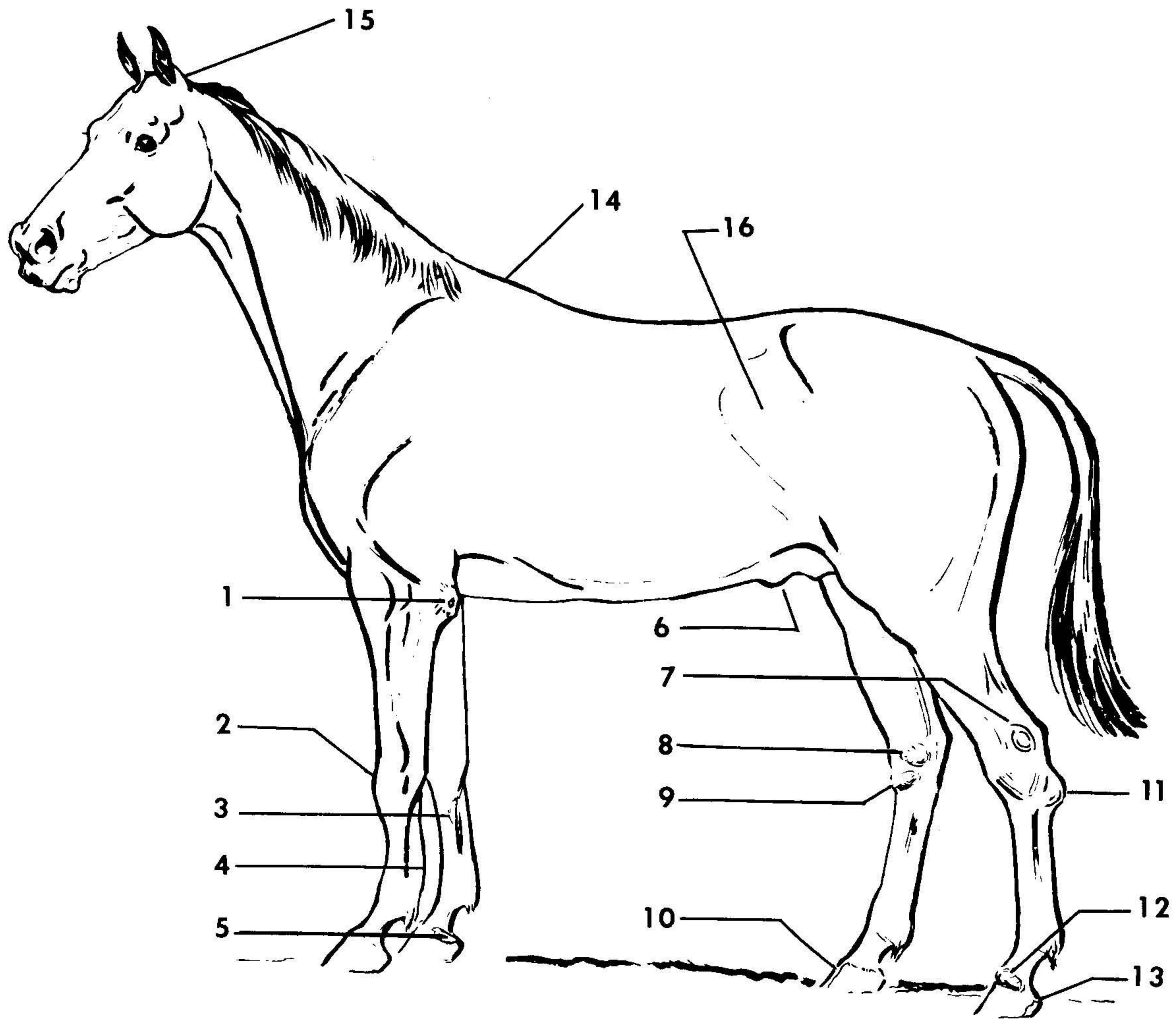
Judging The Horse

Judging starts when the horses are being led around the ring. They should be led around in such a manner that the showman does not obstruct the judge's view of the horse; this is usually clockwise. The judge should position himself in the center of the ring and stay just far enough away from the animals to get a birdseye view of the entire group. He should then compare the general appearance of each horse in the group with his mental picture of the ideal animal. After this has been done, the horses are lined up facing the judge, who now inspects each animal closely for unsoundness and for good and bad points of conformation.

Size and disposition. The size of a horse is usually expressed in height at the withers and in units called "hands" (a hand is 4 inches).

Horses under 14½ hands are called ponies. The size of the horse should be adequate for the purposes for which it is being used and should be suitable for the rider. All things being equal, size is an asset. Temperament is usually expressed through the eyes, the "set" of the ears, and to some extent by stance or movement of the feet, and baring of the teeth. Look for kind, bright, eyes set wide apart.

Study figure 3 so you will know where unsoundness are apt to appear and how to distinguish them. Always inspect the horse's mouth for defective teeth and over-shot and under-shot jaws. These mouth unsoundnesses are highly heritable, so are passed on from parents to offspring. Inspect the eyes closely: blindness can be determined by passing your hand in front of the eyes and



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| 1. SHOE BOIL | 9. BONE SPAVIN |
| 2. OVER IN THE KNEE | 10. TOE CRACK |
| 3. SPLINT | 11. CURB |
| 4. BOWED TENDON | 12. RINGBONE |
| 5. SIDEBONE | 13. QUARTER CRACK |
| 6. HERNIA | 14. FISTULA |
| 7. THOROUGHPIN | 15. POLL EVIL |
| 8. BOG SPAVIN | 16. HIP SHOT |

Fig. 3. Unsoundness of the horse.

observing whether the horse blinks.

The next step in judging is to have each horse walk or trot. The animals should move straight toward the judge, and then away from him, so he can determine if any are lame and also the type of action they possess. Horses with ideal action move their legs straight and true and their movement is snappy and spirited. Horses that travel with their legs too close together, or that paddle or wing-in, do not have desirable structure. (Paddling means throwing the front feet outward as they are picked up; winging-in is an exaggerated paddling.)

There are two types of lameness: supporting, and swinging. Horses with support lameness usually demonstrate this by pointing the lame leg in front of them when standing still. Swinging lameness is seen while the horse is moving. Some horses may exhibit both types of lameness. A horse lame in one front foot will nod his head downward when the sound foot is on the ground. A horse which is lame behind will usually lower the hip on the lame side.

In classifying each horse, a judge usually starts with the feet and legs. The reason for this is because of the fact "no feet no horse". The feet should be in proper proportion to the size of the horse—not too big, not too small. Because the feet have to support the body of the horse, small feet on large horses are not desirable and vice versa. The ideal foot is deep and wide at the heel, dense, and free of cracks and other blemishes.

The pastern bone, which extends from the ankle to the top of hoof, should have a slope of 45 to 50 degrees and should not be too long nor too short. Horses with short, steep pasterns are usually rough riding and are subject to unsoundness. The horse with too much slope on the pastern is referred to as "coon-footed" and because of this weakness is subject to unsoundness.

The cannon bone which reaches from the knee to the ankle, should be clean and free of blemishes; it should appear flat, round, and should measure approximately 8 inches around directly below the knee. The shorter this bone, the more action the animal will have. The tendons should set well back to give the appearance of lots of support below the knee.

The forearms should be long and well muscled, both inside and out (long muscles are more desirable than short ones). The shoulders should show refinement, since coarse shoulders are not desirable, and have plenty of slope, which makes for easy riding. Important points in an ideal horse are ample slope to the shoulders, prominent withers, and a short back. A top-quality horse also has a refined, intelligent-looking head displaying style and quality (see cover page). The head should be wide between the eyes, and the eyes should be large and prominent to allow the horse ample vision in front and behind. Large nostrils are desirable for an ample oxygen supply. Ears should be medium-size and erect. The neck of the ideal horse merges smoothly into the shoulders and conveys a proud and spirited impression (a short, thick neck is not desirable). The back should be short, with ample spring of rib exhibiting a strong loin. The croup should be long and almost level, and the length from hip to the pin bone should be ample: it is here that the horse gets driving power for fast performance. Hind legs of the champion horse should be relatively straight and well muscled at the gaskin (fig. 4). The hock, which is the most important joint on any riding horse, should be clean and free of blemishes. The hind cannon should also be short, broad with flat tendons, well defined and set back to give the hock strong support. The bottom line of the horse should be long with plenty of depth at the flank, which indicates a "good-doing" animal (one which utilizes feed efficiently).

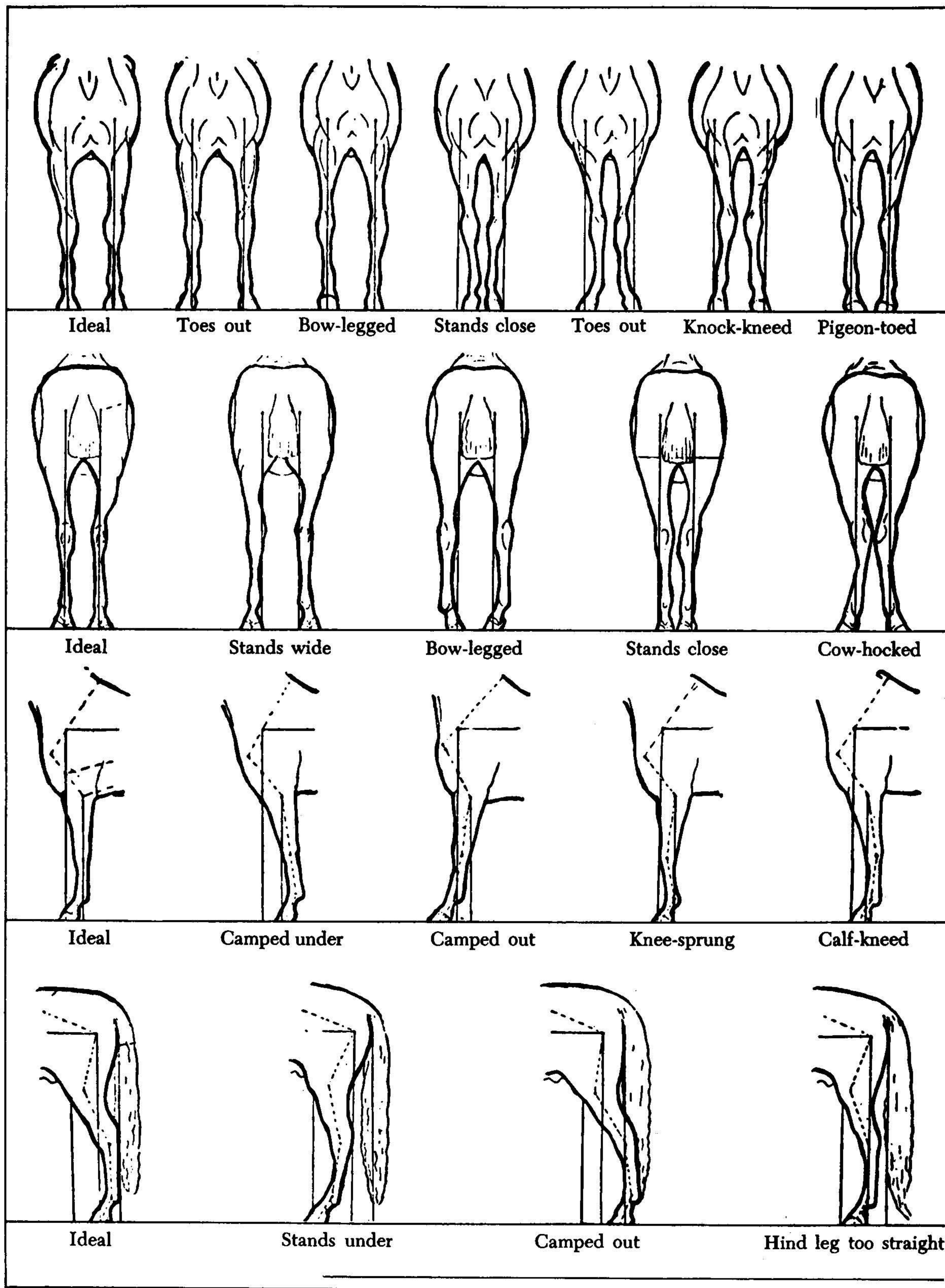


Fig. 4. Ideal conformation, as well as defects, in front and rear legs as viewed from front, rear and side. (Courtesy James P. Gallagher, Penn State University, Pennsylvania.)

Placing The Horse

As soon as the action and soundness of the horse are evaluated, final placing can be determined. After each horse is compared to the others in its class, placing should be easy. After placings are determined, the horses are usually lined up head to tail, with the top horse at the left of the judge. Enough space should be left between each horse so that each can be easily viewed by the audience (and to prevent injuries from jostling to horse and showman).

Now, the judge should explain his decisions. People in the audience often disagree with the judge at first, but after hearing his reasons they often agree. When a judge gives adequate reasons for his placings, there will be less whispering in the crowd and fewer hard feelings among exhibitors when ribbons are handed out.

This final part of the judging procedure requires special training. For example, in describing the different parts of the horse descriptive terms such as “a more nicely balanced animal” or “poorly balanced”, “deeper in the chest”, “steep shoulders”, are used. In giving reasons, a judge should avoid general terms such as “a good head”, “nice shoulders”, “poor feet” etc. The significant features, both good and bad, should be pointed out and explained. As a rule, no two judges see all the entries in a class alike. However, if horse judges are qualified in their art, their decisions are commonly very close.

Again it should be emphasized that giving sound reasons on how horses place in the show ring requires training and experience. There is an old saying to the effect that experience is a harsh teacher but that it is thorough. Placing the horse and giving reasons why adds color and interest to the show, and in the long run will help improve horse-breeding, for it is in the judging arena that desirable type is established.

When you think that you “know your horse flesh” through experience and training, a good way to test your judging ability is to judge horses at a county fair. You are on your own when you do this. If you please the exhibitors, have the crowd with you, and the manager asks you back next year, then you are on your way as a qualified horse judge.

Reading about horses and judging is not enough to meet all the requirements for becoming a qualified horse judge. However, such a study can offer important guidelines for the would-be horse judge. Practice, experience, and studying and working with a qualified horse judge is highly recommended.

It takes confidence and intestinal fortitude to make a final placing. Remember, judge the horse as it appears to you—don't be swayed by a horse's previous awards or by audience applause, nor by how the horse might appear in the eyes of its owner. In doing this, a good judge will be tactful as well as firm.

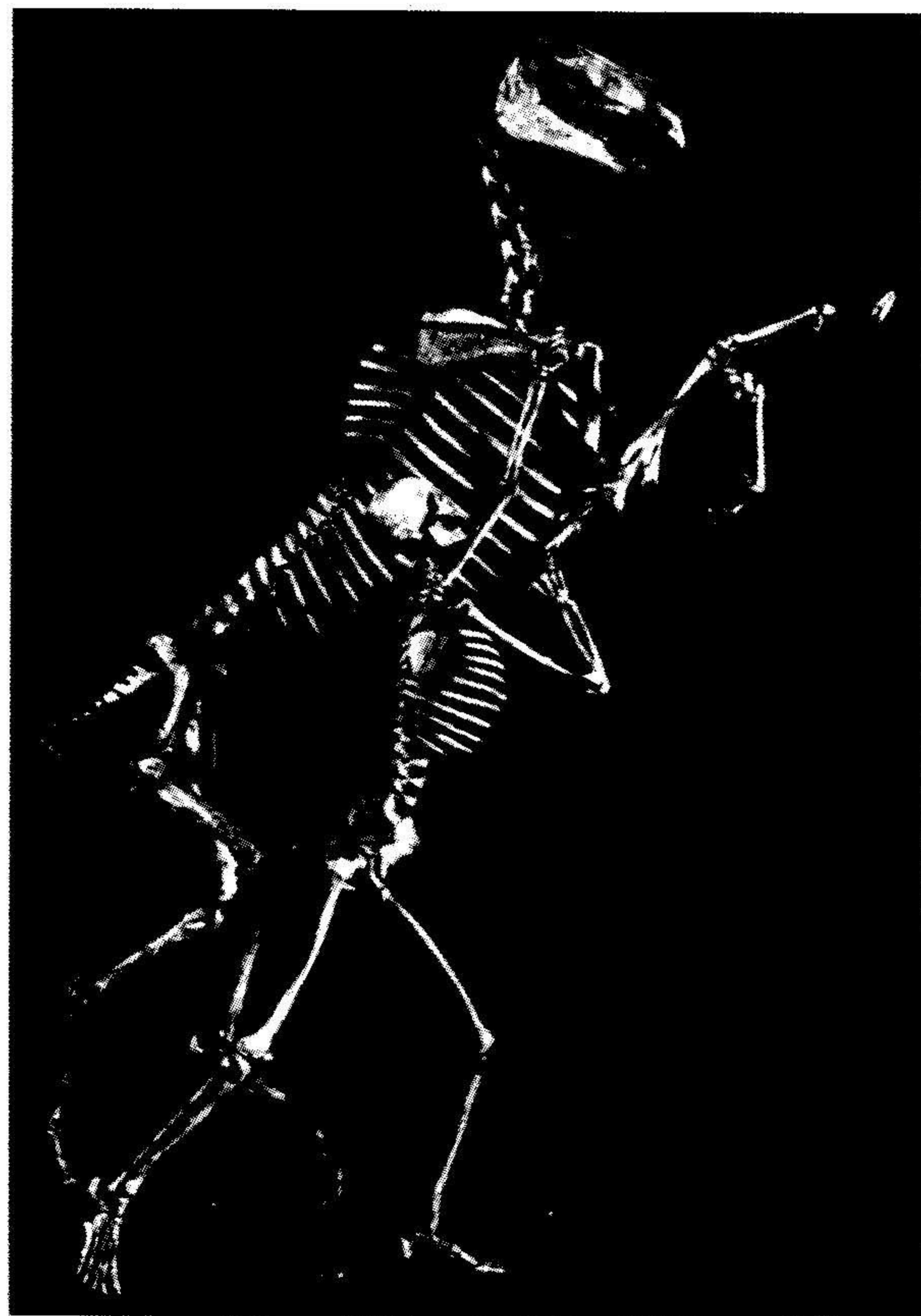


Fig. 5. A comparison of skeletons shows that the heel of man is comparable to the protruding point of the hock on the hind leg of the horse. Likewise, the knee of man has its counterpart in the stifle joint of the horse, while the wrist of man and the front ankle of the horse are comparable. The toe and hoof of the horse are comparable to the middle toe and middle finger and their nail coverings in man. (Photo courtesy American Museum of Natural History, New York, N.Y.)