The Lameness Evaluation
Goal

- What is it?
- Why Might I need one?
- What happens during one?
- Why did you decide to do it this way?
LAMENESS DEFINED

Lameness has been defined as any alteration of the horse’s gait. In addition, lameness can be manifested in such ways as a change in attitude or performance.
LAMENESS DEFINED

These abnormalities can be caused by pain in the following:

- Neck
- Shoulders
- Legs
- Withers
- Back
- Feet
- Loin
- Hips
Why do you need this exam?

- Obvious lameness
- Reduced performance
Aims of the Veterinarian

- Is the horse lame?
- Is the cause a leg/s
- I.D Limb
  - Leg
  - Front
  - Hind
  - Left
  - Right
- Locate within the limb
Aims of the Veterinarian

- Is the cause not a leg/s?
- Is it Neck
  - Back
  - Pelvis
- Which part?
- Characterize the problem
- Give recommendations and prognosis
Challenges

- Breed and use of horse
  - Familiarity of the veterinarian
- Temperament
- Type of lameness
- Expectations
- Examining a sound horse
Requirements

- Lame horse
- Ability to recreate the lameness
- Appropriate area/s for examination
- Rider?
The Examination - History

- Age/Use
- Duration of the problem
- Onset – sudden or gradual
- Response to medication/time off?
- What do you feel/see
- Where do you/your trainer think it is?
- Previous history
- Recent changes – work, shoes, tack
Mechanics of the Examination

- Physical examination
  - Hands and eyes
- Conformation
- Palpation
- Mobility
Examination in Motion

- Walk
- Trot → In hand
- Circling → Hard surface
- Soft surface
- Canter
- With a rider
EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

- Evaluation of the horse in motion. The veterinarian watches the horse walking and trotting. Observing the horse from the front, back and both side views, the veterinarian notes any deviations in gait (such as winging or paddling), failure to land squarely on all four feet and the unnatural shifting of weight from one limb to another.
What are we looking for?

- Stride length
- Fetlock suspension
- Limb flexion
- Head nod
- Hip hike
Head Nod

- Head is a pendulum for weight distribution
- Head moves **down** when the leg is **sound**
- Head moves up when the leg is lame
- Most useful for forelimb lameness
- Will be present with severe hindlimb lameness
Hip Hike

- Look at the croup **not** the legs
- Watch for a hike
- Look at the legs
- The leg going forward when the horse hikes is the lame leg
Now What?

- Blocks
- Imaging
Blocks

- What are they?
- Nerve or joint?
- Sequence
- Timing
- Expectation
Nerve Blocks
Joint Blocks

- Often more specific
- Sequence doesn’t matter
- Asepsis
Blocks

- Are they always useful?
Imaging

• How we come to an actual diagnosis
• Many choices
• Combinations are often required
Radiography

- Standby modality
- Best for bone abnormalities
Ultrasound

- Best for soft tissue
- Sometimes more sensitive for early bone damage
MRI

- Most accurate method of imaging
- Limitations
Diagnosis – Now What?

- Treatment plan
- Prognosis