

Novice

Back

The horse's back is clearly where the saddle goes, but it's important to know exactly where that is in order to make sure you don't put the saddle in a place that might hurt your horse. If you look at Kestrel, you'll see that the 'back' starts just below the withers and ends where the loin starts. This is also the perfect place to sit if you want to ride bareback.

Ears

Horses hear much better than we do and they can swivel their ears up to 180 degrees from front to back to tune into sounds from different directions. You can learn a lot about how a horse is feeling by looking at what the ears are doing. When a horse is relaxed the ears are turned to the side and also relaxed. When they are pointed forward the horse is alert. If they are swiveling back and forth the horse may be nervous and trying to figure out what a sound is and where it is coming from. A horse with pinned ears is giving notice that he or she is not happy and may be about to bite or kick so pay attention!

Eyes

Our eyes are located in the front of our head. A horse's eyes are located on the side of their head, which means that they can see almost 360 degrees around them. The only places a horse can't see are directly in front of him or directly behind his tail. The big, beautiful eyes of a horse are in fact the largest eyeball of any land mammal and they magnify near and far objects so they are twice as big as what we see. These differences help horses spot potential predators from all directions without having to constantly turn their heads.

Forelock

The forelock is the part of the mane that grows between a horse's ears and onto its forehead. Like the mane, the forelock protects from flies in the summer and rain in the winter.

Hoof

The hoof is the horse's foot and the hoof wall is the tough covering that surround the hoof. The hoof wall is a lot like a really, really tough fingernail.

Mane

We can't see Kestrel's mane in this picture, but he's got one and it's important. His mane helps protect him from flies in the summer and rain in the winter. A nice thick mane is also warm in the winter. Fortunately for us, a horse's mane doesn't have nerve endings like our hair does, which means that if you ever need to, you can always grab a handful of mane and you won't hurt your horse.

Muzzle

The muzzle of a horse includes the lips, chin, mouth, nostrils and whiskers. A horse's muzzle is soft, velvety and warm.

Tail

A horse's tail is not only pretty, but is very useful for swatting away flies during the summer. A horse might also swish its tail to let you or another horse know that it is annoyed about something. Kestrel once got his tail caught on something and pulled most of it out. It took three years before it grew out enough to look like a tail again.

Whiskers

A horse's soft muzzle is covered with whiskers, which are very important to helping a horse 'see'. Because their eyes are set on the sides of their head (instead of in front like ours), a horse can't see straight ahead. When a horse is grazing, those whiskers help the horse know if there is an object directly ahead that he or she might run into. They even help the horse avoid each rocks or pebbles that might be in their hay.

Withers

The withers are the highest point of the horse's thoracic vertebrae, just above a horse's shoulder blades. Other animals, like dogs, cows and sheep have withers too. A horse's height in 'hands' is measured at the top of the withers. Some horses, like UE, have very large withers while others, like Indie's, are barely noticeable.

Student

Cannon Bone

The cannon bone is the long, straight bone located between the knee and the fetlock joint in the front legs and the hock and the fetlock joint on the hind legs.

Chestnuts

Horses have small growths on the inside of the front and hind legs called chestnuts. As chestnuts grow, riders often pick them off to keep them flat. They more or less flake off without a lot of trouble.

Crest

The horse's mane grows from the crest, or upper part, of a horse's neck.

Dock

The hairs that make up a horse's tail are attached to the dock, which is the living part of a horse's tail.

Girth

The girth is the area right behind the elbow of the horse and this is where the "girth" or "cinch" goes when you put a saddle on. It's important to always make sure the girth area is very clean before you put a saddle on.

Hock

The hock is a large joint on the back legs that is located in a similar place as the knee on the front legs. Believe it or not, this joint is similar to your ankle joint.

Knee

This is a large joint in the front legs of the horse. Although it looks like the horse's knee might be similar to our elbow, it's actually the same as your wrist joint, except that it can't move side to side.

Poll

The poll is located just between or immediately behind a horse's ears. Horses are sometimes sensitive about being touched in this area, which can be a problem when you're putting on a bridle or a halter. Good training and patience can fix this problem.

Apprentice

Coronet Band

The coronet (or coronary) band is a soft band of tissue at the top of the horse's hoof. It's similar to the cuticle of your fingernail and is where the hoof wall grows from.

Croup

The croup is also called the 'rump' and is the top of the hindquarters, extending from the hip to the dock of the tail.

Elbow

A horse's elbow is similar to your elbow except that it can't rotate side to side like yours can. Each of the front legs has an elbow where the belly of the horse meets the leg.

Fetlock Joint

If you were a horse, the ball of your foot would be your fetlock joint. In a horse, the fetlock joint connects the cannon bone to the pastern.

Gaskin

The gaskin is a large muscle on the hind leg – above the hock and below the stifle – that's the same muscle as your calf muscle.

Loin

The loin goes from the last rib to the croup of the horse. This is the weakest part of a horse's back and one of the reasons it's important for your saddle to sit in exactly the right place. If the saddle is too far back the horse's loin is supporting too much weight.

Pastern

The pastern joint is the part of the leg between the fetlock and the top of the hoof. The pastern may seem like a small part of the leg, but the angle and length of the pastern are very important to the way a horse moves. The pastern is the same bone as a human toe.

Shoulder

The angle of a horse's shoulder helps determine how a horse moves when it goes forward and how high it can go when it jumps. (Kestrel, by the way, doesn't really like jumping). The shoulder goes from the withers to the point of the shoulder.

Stifle

The stifle joint is located where the hind leg connects to the horse's body. The stifle is almost exactly like your knee and even has a knee cap. This joint helps the horse's hind legs move forward, instead of just up and down.