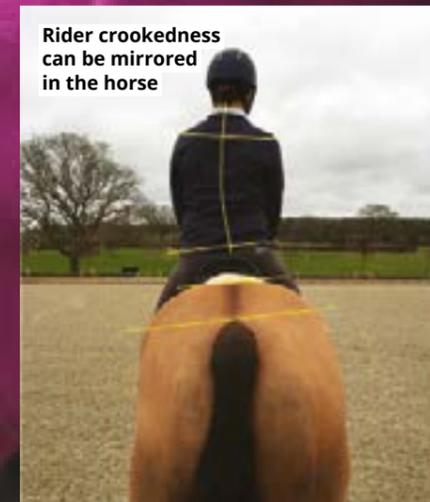


A straight approach



Rider crookedness can be mirrored in the horse



The horse can only move straight with a level pelvis

The McTimoney technique aims to align and balance the musculoskeletal system

“Pelvis and hindquarter symmetry is key for a horse to use himself correctly,” Laura continues. “The pelvis is the ‘engine’ of the horse, so it’s vital to identify asymmetry here and level out the difference.”

“Research on asymmetry is limited as it is difficult for to obtain quantifiable measurements, but without doubt a vast majority of riders will acknowledge the existence of a ‘good’ rein and a ‘bad’ rein.”

“It is important to think about whether the good and bad reins are an indication of a more pronounced lack of straightness in the the rider and thus the horse’s pelvis.”

Laura’s study established that natural asymmetries occur in horses and riders and with regards to the pelvis, they do significantly influence one another.

The greater awareness we have of these imbalances, she says, the more we can actively do to level them out.

The solutions will vary from partnership to partnership but schooling exercises (such as polework), McTimoney sessions which focus specifically on identifying asymmetries and

Learn how straightness and suppleness are vital in the ridden horse and discover easy ways to identify and resolve asymmetry

Good owners and riders know that correct care and management of a horse is key to his wellbeing. But while many people are keen to learn how to improve their horse’s quality of life at every possible opportunity, how often are straightness and suppleness considered, along with the ways these factors impact on each other?

Something as simple as how straight a rider sits in the saddle and how evenly their weight is distributed can have a huge impact on the

horse and his enjoyment of ridden work. It also has big implications for his suppleness, as if the horse is trying to compensate for imbalance in the rider, it affects his own ability to work evenly on both reins.

Laura Browne, a McTimoney Animal Practitioner, has investigated the relationship between horse and rider asymmetry in a research study.

“I wanted to look at the complete picture of horse and rider, with a focus on the fact that it is a partnership,” says Laura. “There

is so much more riders (both leisure riders and competitors) can do in terms of strength, suppleness, coordination and balance to help themselves and their horses.

“We talk about ‘core strength’ a lot for horses but do we consider our own core strength often enough?”

“It is becoming increasingly recognised these days, but when I carried out my research in 2014, core strength and stability (which leads to a straight and balanced position in the saddle) was only just being recognised

as a factor that could impact the horse’s performance and increase the risk of injury.”

One sidedness

Laura’s research shows that riders and horses favour one side over the other – everyone has a strong and a weak side. Asymmetry in the rider is commonly reflected in their horse – they share the same ‘weak’ side.

“It is difficult to say whether the horse can give the rider an asymmetric pelvis or vice versa, but the likelihood is that if one half of the horse/rider partnership isn’t straight, the other won’t be either,” Laura states.

Appropriate schooling can improve the situation, rather than settling for a certain degree of ‘wonkiness’ and possible discomfort.



This photo shows a horse with an asymmetrical pelvis



The picture is much straighter after McTimoney treatment

Horse sense Therapies

promoting straightness (in horse and rider), Pilates, saddle fitting, video analysis and increased knowledge of biomechanics could all be beneficial.

"The aim is to produce a happier and more harmonious horse and rider partnership, with potential for early detection of lameness and reducing long-term serious injuries," concludes Laura.

How to spot asymmetry

- Ask a friend to video you from behind when you are riding your horse. Ride away from the camera in walk and trot. When you watch the film back, look to see if your hips and shoulders are in alignment with your horse's pelvis. Is the right hip bone the same height as the left one?
- The saddle slipping to one side can indicate asymmetry. This can be caused by a number of things, including incorrect saddle and/or girth fit, a crooked horse (which could benefit from McTimoney treatment), lameness, or a combination of these things.
- Your stirrups can tell you a fair bit about straightness. Remove your leathers from the saddle – are they both a similar length? If the lengths are different, it may be because you put more weight on one side than the other. Another indication of a lack of straightness is if the leathers are totally even, yet you feel your stirrups are wonky.
- Have someone stand your horse up square on a level surface. Then, stand a safe distance behind him and look at the muscle development of the hindquarters. Is it even?



Have your saddle fit checked by a qualified professional

If you feel there may be a straightness issue, you can ask a knowledgeable friend or your instructor to help you assess your horse. An instructor will help you improve your position and can suggest exercises to improve your horse's suppleness.

Having your saddle correctly fitted by a registered saddler fitter, and then getting the fit regularly checked, is vital. Incorrect saddle fit can cause many problems, which will cause a horse pain and affect his way of going.

Also, if you are concerned about your horse, contact your vet to come out and examine him. You can ask them to refer you to a suitable therapist, such as a McTimoney practitioner. ■

CASE STUDY

"Regular McTimoney therapy complements Frog's schooling programme"

Frog has McTimoney therapy to help keep him supple and flexible



Photo: Tim Holt

Frog (Batu Ferringhi) is an 11-year-old Thoroughbred gelding that has run in point-to-point and National Hunt races since he was aged four.

He's still point-to-pointed, but owner Clare Hitch has started competing him in dressage. Frog's first dressage outing resulted in a score of 69 per cent.

Clare's work rider, Heidi Stevens, is an eventer and she has devised a schooling programme for Frog, enabling him to improve on a long-standing issue of hanging to the left when racing.

"Heidi schools Frog to keep him supple and improve his attitude and flexibility, as well as his gallop work," says Clare. "He has always had an issue on the left rein, and has to go on a left-handed track to race, but the schooling has helped."

McTimoney Animal Practitioner Sarah Hedderly treats Frog's back, ensuring regular maintenance therapy complements the schooling and the galloping training each week.

"I am all for correct schooling and back treatments," says Clare. "I treat horses like an athlete. I go to physio or to a chiropractor myself, and these therapies can benefit horses, too," says Clare.

"McTimoney is very hands on and enables the fine-tuning of my horses and complements the training process.

"It makes life easier if the horse is supple and jumps evenly through the body, rather than all from the front. Hopefully, this means they can get their head in front and will run the race you want them to run and perform the way you want them to perform. Sarah is brilliant for ironing out slight muscle tension and asymmetries."

Clare's approach takes into account all aspects of the successful athlete.

"I want a happy horse as well as a supple horse," she adds. "Training is about looking at the bigger picture, and considering the mental aspects, as well as the physical side."

Find a practitioner

All members of the McTimoney Animal Association are qualified after training with the McTimoney College in Abingdon, having studied up to three years at postgraduate level attaining an MSc or Post Graduate Diploma in Animal Manipulation.

McTimoney Animal Practitioners are registered with the McTimoney Animal Association.

For more information about McTimoney, and to find a local practitioner, visit: www.mctimoney-animal.org.uk.