

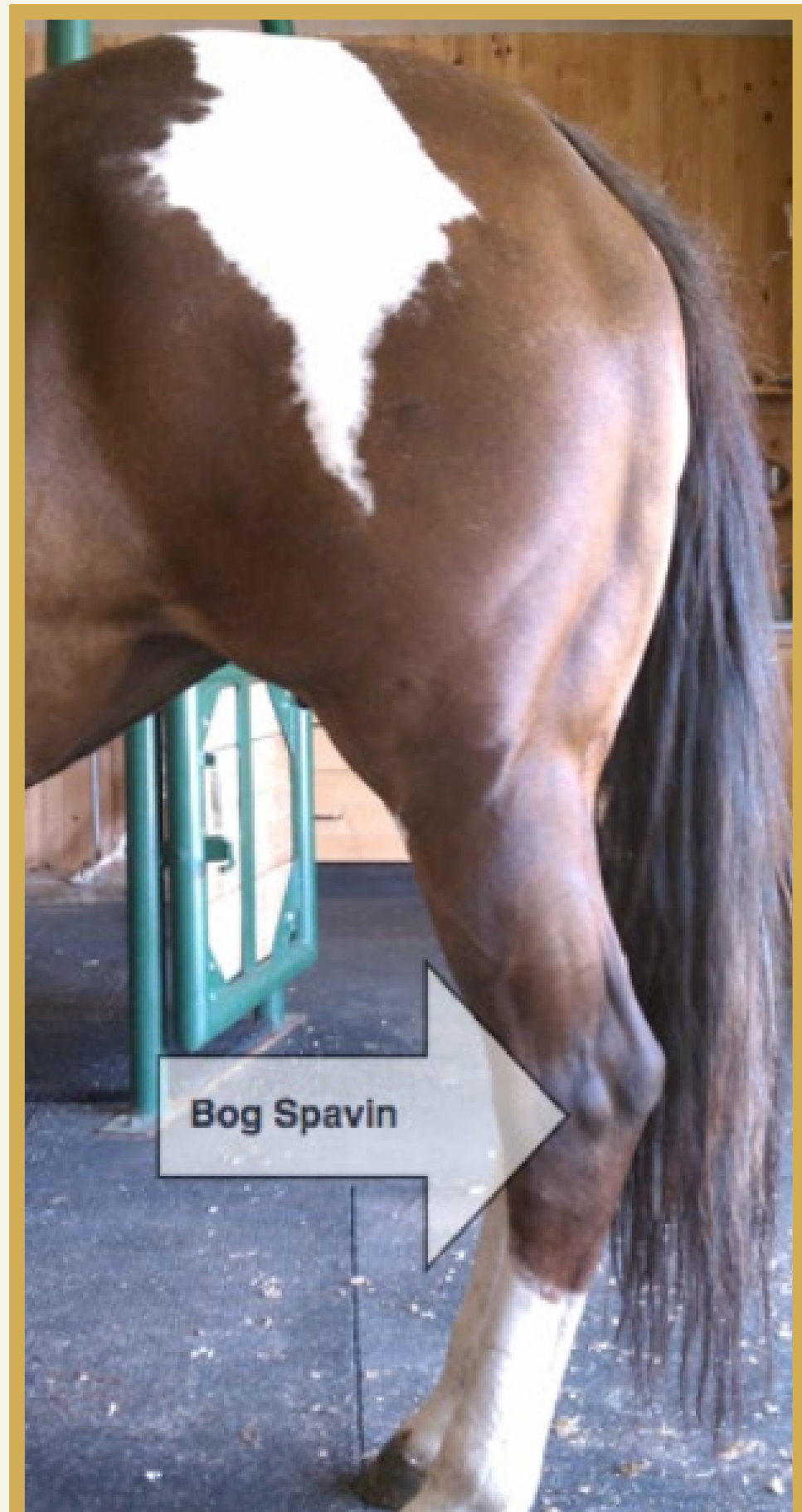
MASTERING EQUINE CONFORMATION

CONFORMATION FAULTS OF THE HIND LIMBS

SICKLE HOCKS

The hind cannon bones should be perpendicular to the ground. Excessive angulation of the hock joints (sickle hocks) causes the cannon bones to be at an angle. This stresses the tarsal ligaments and predisposes the horse to bog spavin. Bog spavin is joint effusion of the tibiotarsal joint (the topmost hock joint).

This swelling is not typically painful but indicates an underlying stress to the hocks. Some breeders of Tennessee Walking Horses are breeding for sickle hocks with the rationale that the horse can step under himself more. This is not correct and eventually results in lameness.



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POST-LEGGED



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The horse on the right has excessively straight legs when viewed from the side due to reduced angulation of the hock and stifle joints. Angulation of a joint is necessary to absorb the concussive forces of the leg impacting the ground. Horses with less stifle and hock angulation are predisposed to two conditions:

1. Arthritis of the hock (bone spavin)
2. Upward fixation of the patella (knee cap), also known as a “locking stifle”

All the joints in the hind limb move together. If the stifle bends, so do the hock and fetlock. If the stifle cannot bend, the entire limb remains extended. This is what allows a horse to stand while sleeping. When resting, a horse “locks” his stifle by lifting the patellar ligaments over a bony prominence of the femur. The horse can then sleep standing up without exerting muscular effort.

Upward fixation of the patella occurs when the horse cannot subconsciously contract the quadriceps muscle and elevate the patella to release the locking mechanism. If the horse has very upright conformation, the stifle can be difficult to unlock, resulting in intermittent unintentional locking of the hind leg. These horses may refuse to move or drag the hind leg until the ligament releases.

Young horses undergoing growth spurts, or horses with weak musculature such as a stall-bound horse, can develop locking patellas. Once the horse finishes growing or its conditioning improves, locking stifles usually no longer occur.

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CAMPED OUT

A horse that is camped out behind has hind legs that do not stand squarely underneath him. This horse is less able to engage the hind end and, as a result, overloads the front end. He moves with a short, choppy gait and pulls the hind end instead of pushing with it.

Horses may appear camped out due to the way they are standing but not actually have a conformation fault. The first horse has long gaskins and is slightly camped out. The second, a Spotted Saddle Horse, has been trained to stand “parked out” to accentuate a flat croup and make it easier for the rider to mount a tall horse.



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COW HOCKED

Cow hock conformation is desirable in draft breeds because the hip set angle is better for pushing into the harness. In a riding horse, however, cow hock conformation shortens the stride and causes overloading of the inside of the hock joints. The horse also has less ability to collect and generate suspension because the legs do not travel straight under the body.

