



Equine Pathway Programme



A simple and versatile therapeutic programme for handlers, riders and trainers to use, in order to keep ridden horses, healthy, sound and performing to their optimum. The EPP is also highly effective in aiding recovery from illness, injury from uncomfortable saddles, feet etc., and the loss of natural movement/behaviour through inappropriate training methods.

This programme has evolved from many years of working with horses, damaged by conventionally fitted saddles and all the problems associated with the common restrictions of movement and discomfort created by the limitations of conventional saddle fitting.

In the early days of their research, the founders of the BALANCE organization recognized that it was much easier for most horses to get the full benefits of moving from saddles that were doing them harm, into saddles that supported their needs, if they could have some time off work in-between.

Although it was obvious that the horses were uncomfortable and that their movement had been corrupted by saddles that had not been designed or fitted with their comfort as the priority, they had, over time, worked out ways to adapt and compensate in order to 'hide' the true extent of these problems. This habit of trying to appear as 'normal' as possible comes from the days when horses were predominantly prey animals and needed to mask any evidence of injury, to avoid being noticed by predators.

To take a horse out of its tight and restrictive saddle along with all of its coping strategies and put it straight into a saddle that allowed it to move its body in a completely different way, albeit a better way, was too big a change for some horses to cope with.

It was like taking the proverbial rug out from under their feet and instead of being able to take advantage of the new feelings of comfort and freedom in their new saddle, some of them could become mentally and physically tense.

It was clear that they needed some time to let go of their old habits and expectations before being invited to explore a whole, new way of interacting with the saddle and the rider by using the Constructive form of saddling, developed by Carol Brett and Lesley Taylor, known as The BALANCE Saddling System.

Most of these horses had significant lack of muscle development in the saddle area, together with postures and movement patterns that were no longer natural or efficient. All created by direct and indirect saddle related damage.

A horse that was just turned out in a field for 3 months between saddles would certainly benefit from the break and a recovery of compressed muscle would be observed, along with a reduction of over-stimulation of reflexes from the regular use of a tight saddle; also any bruising and tenderness would also be diminished.

This meant that when the horse was subsequently put into a better saddle, it was more able to take advantage of the improvement to its comfort and freedom.

However, if the owner was willing to spend some time, several times a week, encouraging the horse to move for even short periods, either in hand or on a line, where it would move in a regular, rhythmic and balanced way, the improvements to the mental and physical health of the horse were

remarkable and speedy. The key to the method was paying attention to the quality in which the horse was encouraged to move, rather than the amount of work it did.

It was not unusual, in the early days of the BALANCE organisation for someone to have to wait for 12 weeks for a new BALANCE saddle to be made! Unlike conventional saddling, once the horse's owner had realised the damage that their own saddle was doing, there was no way they were willing to ever put it back onto their horse. The idea of doing nothing with their horse for 12 weeks was often more than people could cope with, and knowing the benefits that were available by the horse doing some therapeutic movement on a regular basis, encouraged BALANCE to develop a simple programme for horse owners to use.

Such were the observable benefits to the soundness, health, attitude and performance in horses who went through this BALANCE Remedial Programme, that many horse owners decided to use it every time they brought their horse back from a rest period as a foundation for their fittening and training work.

It is also used now when starting young horses so that by the time they have to cope with the unnatural weight of the rider, they are confident in their own balance and co-ordination.

It has become increasingly obvious that it has far wider applications than aiding the recovery of a damaged horse, hence the change of name to **THE EQUINE PATHWAY PROGRAMME**.

The physical benefits to the horse are clear, but there are many other ways in which the EPP seems to help the horse and the rider.

For example:

- When the rider spends time observing and working their horse from the ground, with the specific aim of improving the balance of the horse, they get a far better understanding and feel of the horse's habits and patterns. Then, when they are riding, this knowledge and feel translates into much more effective ways for them to help the horse.
- Working the horse from the ground with such an emphasis on straightness and balance, requires that the rider pays much attention to his or her own balance, co-ordination and clarity of communication. This carries through into their ridden work, to the benefit of the horse, the rider and their combined performance.
- The EPP works on many levels, from the physical movement and posture of the horse, through to the re-programming of nerve pathways and movement patterns that had become corrupted and out of sync.
- Working the horse during the **Equine Pathway Programme** seems to create and/or strengthen the bond of trust that the horse has with his person.

Some horse owners have an abhorrence of the idea of not riding for weeks or months and believe that any time not riding is a waste of time! Humans are not always the most patient and tolerant of creatures and our society is becoming increasingly ruled by the need for instant gratification, so the notion that some things are worth waiting for, has become difficult to 'sell'! However, when the health, soundness or performance of the horse has been damaged, the fastest way to recovery is to take as much time as it needs for the horse to recover! More haste, less speed is the old saying. However, if the human element of the horse/human partnership can discipline themselves to focus on the quality and efficiency of bio-mechanics in their own body and that of their horse, it is amazing how quickly one can see the improvements and benefits of their interaction.

The **Equine Pathway Programme** helps people to help horses in a simple, logical way that does not require complicated equipment or advanced levels of riding experience.

For more information, go to:

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