

THE CROUP HIGH HORSE

A croup high horse is one that stands taller behind than in front—higher over the croup than over the withers. This is something that unfortunately, we often see in Thoroughbreds with conformations intended for running fast. However, the same thing can be found in other breeds, including Quarter Horses that are used to catch cattle lassoed by cowboy riders, and even some Warmbloods.

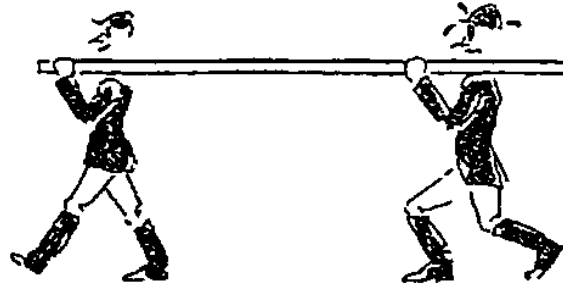
A horse that is croup high naturally places more weight over his forehead (the rider feels like he is riding downhill), which is against all rules for dressage. A croup high horse puts too much wear and tear on his forelegs and also finds it difficult to carry himself in the more collected movements. Furthermore, the rider of such a horse often feels that the horse leans on the bit, or gets behind the bit by flexing the neck too much.

When working with a horse that is croup high, we must take certain things into consideration, so that we do not overload his hind legs. The hocks and stifles are the most vulnerable, but there is also a risk for injury to the back. So we must train these horses with these issues in mind. If the horse has a good natural tempo it is a good idea to ride him more forward - that is, at a slightly higher speed, encouraging the horse to move more naturally and with a more uphill frame. Riding more forward will often help the horse to recover any loss of balance and tempo.

When we collect the croup high horse, we must be careful not to do it for lengthy time intervals. The work should alternate between collection, where the horse engages and carries more weight on his hind legs, and riding in a longer and lower frame, where he can relax the muscles in his hind legs and back. Avoid riding too many small circles (at least not too many in a row) since this will overload his hind legs, and when schooling leg-yields, don't ask for too much angle. Instead, put the emphasis on moving forward fluidly. If tension or resistance develops, straighten the horse and ride him forward again.

Shoulder-in and haunches-in are good movements for teaching the horse to increase engagement, especially when ridden on circles, but in the beginning, these movements should only be ridden for short distances.

Perhaps it sounds as if the croup high horse is totally unsuited to dressage, but thank goodness, this is seldom the case. We must understand though, that dressage is more challenging for such horses and we must take this into consideration in our training program.



Two men with a board across their shoulders. The man in back must walk with his knees bent in order to keep it in balance. Likewise, a croup high horse in order to be level balanced will have to adopt a posture that will feel unnatural to him.

It is important to make the horse supple and free in his work, well-muscled and correctly educated in order to lessen the strain on his joints. The following exercises can be used to work toward these goals:

- Transitions
- Changes of tempo
- Shoulder-in
- Any work that is alternately muscle building and suppling
- Work over cavalettis
- Work in hand, where we have the opportunity to collect the horse while he is not carrying any weight on his back.