

Top-Line™ Evaluation System (TES)

Assessing Current Muscle Status in Horses

The Top-Line™ Evaluation System (TES) assesses your horse's overall muscle development. Muscle over the back, loin, hip and hindquarters enable your horse to lengthen, elevate, stop and turn and to drive. The **TES** is a visual and hands-on assessment of a horse's topline from the withers back through and including the hip area.

The three areas to evaluate include:

1. The withers to the mid-back
2. The mid-back to the top of the hip or croup
3. Over the hip and down through the hindquarters

TES uses an **A** through **D** grade scale, with **A** showing no problems and **D** showing problems in each of the three areas of the topline.

GRADE	VISUAL DESCRIPTION
A Ideal	This horse has ideal muscle development for its body type. Muscle is full beside the withers and along the spinal column, such that the vertebrae cannot be seen. The hip is full and the stifle muscles are defined. This horse should be able to perform work that requires use of these muscle areas.
B Sunken beside the withers and back	This horse is adequately muscled, except it is sunken beside the withers and back. You may have trouble fitting this horse with a saddle, so the horse may develop soreness. This can negatively impact attitude and performance.
C Sunken from the withers through the loins	This horse is sunken from the withers through the loins. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscles beside the withers remain sunken-in on either side. • Back and loin areas appear boney. • Vertebrae will be higher than the muscles beside them. • Muscling over the hip and hindquarters is adequate. <p>These underdeveloped muscles in the back and loin area may become sore and performance using the back will be difficult.</p>
D Entire topline and hip are poor	The entire topline and hip are affected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hip appears pointed at the top since the vertebrae are higher than the muscles. • The muscles appear very flat over the croup. • In the most severely affected horses, the stifle area is also narrowed. <p>This horse will lack the strength and stamina to sustain performance.</p>

Improving the topline

There is a common misconception that work builds muscle. Work alone conditions and trains muscles that the horse already has. A balanced diet containing the necessary levels of all of the essential amino acids will improve topline muscles.

How long does it take to correct an inadequate topline?

Once the diet is balanced and adequate amino acids are provided, it will take an average of 30 days for a horse to improve one grade. Severe cases can take up to 90 days to improve the entire topline.

Muscle development starts at the hip and gradually moves forward across the back and withers.

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