

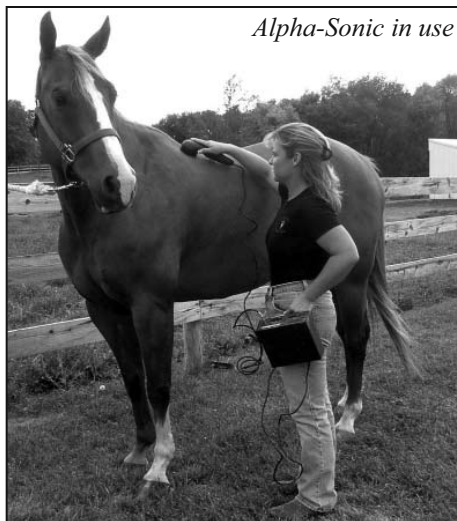
# Animal Chiropractic and your Performance Horse

by Dr. Christine Woodford, DVM

Performance horses are the athletes of the equine world. Their bodies are extremely vulnerable to injury due to the strain of athletic conditioning, regardless of discipline. For example, dressage and western pleasure horses require the movement of the spine in multiple directions and the spine must remain supple for optimal performance. Jumpers and barrel horses, on the other hand, require even more movement through the spine. This is due to the twisting action of both the spine and the hind legs that is needed to clear high fences or the sharp turning of a barrel. Race horses, with fast starts and long distances, put extreme stress on their entire body. The stress of any kind of work can result in a disruption of natural motion of the horse's vertebrae.

Chiropractic care for your animal involves adjustment of *vertebral subluxations* of the spinal column (neck, back, pelvis, and sacrum) and the extremities of the shoulders, front legs, hips, and hind legs) of the animal. A vertebral subluxation is defined as a spinal misalignment or joint dysfunction resulting in neurological or biomechanical dysfunction. In simpler terms, subluxation means that there is an abnormal range of motion in the joint. When a subluxation occurs in the horse's spine, it typically becomes less flexible and thus stiff. This can lead to resistance and decreased performance. The most common symptom associated with spinal subluxations is pain. Horses in pain will show compensatory changes in posture and gait.

The horse's spinal column contains 51-57 individual vertebrae. The vertebrae protect the spinal cord and nerves. These nerves exit the spine and divide into numerous branches which lead to various parts of the body including joints and muscles. When the nerves that exit the spine become irritated due to a vertebral subluxation they will perform abnormally causing both ligaments and muscles to spasm, causing pain in the area. To alleviate pain, a chiropractor will perform an adjustment on the horse to restore joints to their normal motion. A common question asked is how can a human adjust a 1000 pound horse? Because of the size of the horse, it is impossible to adjust the whole horse with one maneuver. A chiropractor works on one joint at a time to restore the normal motion. Although the horse outweighs the chiropractor, the chiropractor outweighs



*Alpha-Sonic in use*



*Activator in use*

one of the horse's joints.

The entire horse, from the head, neck, back, pelvis, sacrum, ribs, shoulders, hips, front and hind legs, are evaluated in a chiropractic session and the affected areas are adjusted. The adjustment is a short lever, high velocity, controlled thrust by hand or instrument at a specific joint. An instrument used by some chiropractors is an activator. The activator delivers a precise, high velocity thrust to a specific area. The science of physics has proven that force is equal to mass times acceleration ( $F = m \times a$ ). The activator can deliver the right amount of force to adjust a horse's joint, by its high speed, rather than a large amount of mass. The activator delivers that acceleration each time and does not get fatigued as does the hand. By employing the use of an activator, a chiropractor can do several adjustments, with less wear and tear on his body.

To increase effectiveness of a chiropractic treatment, alternative therapies can also be used. For example, Alpha Sonic treatment has proven to be an effective treatment for pain management. The Alpha Sonic machine delivers low frequency sound waves that stimulate the body's immune system. Sound waves then invigorate the local area, stimulating nerve cells and increasing nervous communication

to the brain. The instrument promotes microcirculation which relaxes muscles and decreases inflammation which promotes healing. This machine has been proven effective on muscle tension, muscle pain, joint pain, vertebral pain, nerve pain and internal pain. The instrument operates by passing the transducer over acupuncture meridians throughout the body. This is effective when a horse is showing symptoms such as overall stiffness, edema and fatigue. The transducer can also be applied directly to an affected area. The Alpha Sonic machine is very effective in both treating ailments and preparing a horse for chiropractic work through deep relaxation.

With the use of multiple therapies it is possible to make the performance horse as comfortable and efficient as possible. Proper alignment of the spine affects the function of the entire body. Keeping the spine healthy and supple through different therapies including chiropractic, acupuncture, alpha sonic treatment, nutritional therapies and proper conditioning can help a horse reach its optimal performance.

## Seeing is Believing

by Jodi Siamis  
Smith Racing Stable

In late 2005, a standardbred race horse of mine had just come off a not-so-impressive meet and was showing signs of tightness and lameness. His desire to run far outweighed his athletic ability, and I wanted to help him be the best that he could be. The recommendation came from my veterinarian, Dr. Christine Woodford, to try the chiropractic approach and incorporate this into my training program to increase his flexibility and endurance. The results were amazing from the first treatment! And he went on to become a winner. I credit his success to his chiropractic adjustments.

And recently, a two-year-gelding in our stable showed signs of soreness. His back was tight, and his hind legs stiff. I called upon Dr. Christine Woodford to evaluate him. With her recommendation, the horse received an alpha sonic treatment and a chiropractic adjustment. That horse went on to win the Sire's Stake Race in Missouri this August. The only change in his training program was the chiropractic adjustments.

In closing, I would strongly recommend educating yourself about chiropractic. It is great for your horse, it is non-invasive, affordable, and you get results. From our viewpoint, you can't ask for much more than that. And seeing the results made believers out of all of us at Smith Racing Stables!

