

<p><b>Perfect Spine</b> →</p>	<p><u><b>Straightness</b></u> Spine well aligned under saddle and rider – easy to ride straight with little resistance and/or quarters swinging</p>	<p><u><b>Contact</b></u> ability to stretch through thoracic spine when ridden or long-reined. Light and pliable in the contact, flexible, soft and working easily and willingly on the bit even for novice riders</p>	<p><u><b>Impulsion and purity of gaits</b></u> Plenty of impulsion when asked for. No unwanted tension through transitions and no running out of balance</p>	<p><u><b>Happy?</b></u> A happy horse. Easy to mount and handle and consistent in his/her behaviour</p>
<p><b>Slightly dipped or weak back – minor impingement of spinal processes</b></p>	<p><u><b>Straightness</b></u> At times this will feel difficult to completely achieve and as the impulsion increases the straightness will feel more difficult to obtain.</p>	<p><u><b>Contact</b></u> The contact will not be as even as it should be and neck flexion will begin to be difficult especially at the beginning of the work. Real stretching may be inconsistent</p>	<p><u><b>Impulsion and purity of gait</b></u> As the rider asks for more impulsion the horse will probably run a little or try to hollow slightly and feel difficult to continue smoothness in sitting trot.</p>	<p><u><b>Happy?</b></u> A little unhappy at times and not as consistent as a thinking, feeling rider would like it to be. Have the confidence to ask for help before things get worse</p>
<p><b>Kissing Spines</b> →</p>	<p><u><b>Straightness</b></u> This will be difficult to obtain consistently and the horse will resist your efforts – it will always favour being crooked and is now starting to strain its sacro-iliac joint as it guards the thoracic spine area causing more tightness and problems for the rider</p>	<p><u><b>Contact</b></u> This can be very snatchy – ie difficult for the rider to keep a consistent feel on the reins where the horse will feel the need to snatch and is by now compensating through its cervical spine (the neck) as he guards his thoracic against the pain and discomfort of carrying a rider and having to work. Stretching will be difficult some days or may only feel as it happens from the withers forward and not through the whole back</p>	<p><u><b>Impulsion and purity of gait</b></u> This will be more difficult to obtain when rider is on board but often easier on the long-reins – time to take note of this and seek help. Again hollowing will occur, crookedness and resistance</p>	<p><u><b>Happy?</b></u> Some days more unhappy than others – not consistent – longissimus dorsi (main muscle in the back) will go into spasm more somedays than others. If it's a mare she will be called 'mar-ish' or hormonal – if it's a gelding God knows what excuses will be made!</p>
<p><b>Bad well-established Kissing Spines</b> →</p>	<p><u><b>Straightness</b></u> Never really truly possible</p>	<p><u><b>Contact</b></u> Hard, unyielding, resistant and attempts to encourage roundness will be resisted through the jaw, neck and obviously the back. Often very snatchy. <b>Head shaking</b> often starts at this stage – running to the tack shop for a different bit will not help!</p>	<p><u><b>Impulsion and purity of gait</b></u> Very difficult to obtain consistently. Some horses will run from the leg and the rider feels out of control and others will just not go forward and show real inability to give any smoothness in transitions . Bucking may occur especially at the beginning of the work and should not be ignored and labelled as 'full of character' Severe or mild dropping of the thoracic spine may occur when rider gets on</p>	<p><u><b>Happy?</b></u> An unhappy horse that does not work consistently well, is not easy to mount safely and calmly and will show bad behaviour when rider is on board particularly when asked for any engagement. At this stage the horse can feel like a 'time bomb' to ride due to pain and muscle spasm and is often referred by those who don't know as <b>Cold-backed!</b></p>