

THE HORSE.

The Age of the Horse.

BY DR. G. H. CONN.

Of all the many features connected with the care and management of the horse, that of age has always given the average individual the greatest concern. There is scarcely a single person that has had any experience to speak of with horses but that has had a desire to learn how to tell the age of the horse, especially from the appearance of the teeth. While this is not the only method practiced yet it is the one around which more or less mystery seems to remain. We quite well remember from our early youth how wonderful it must be to just open a horse's mouth and look at his teeth and be able to tell how old he was. Since that time we have spent several years in a line of work that enabled us to follow up that earlier inclination, but after practicing our knowledge on several thousand animals we are more firmly convinced than ever of the truth of our early day belief.

It is not uncommon to find some of our old pioneers who can tell the age of the horse by feeling of the ribs; others tell it by counting small nodules under the skin on the under side of the dock; and a few other ways. We were never sufficiently interested enough in these methods to make the attempt to acquire the art. In our judgment their best value to the practical horseman is in being quickly forgotten.

The person with limited experience is the one who, through thick and thin, has unbiased faith in man's ability to determine a horse's age by his teeth without a possible chance of error. It is this lack of experience that produces this certainty of judgment for the reason that he has not had the opportunity of determining these special features, that will prove the fallacy of such belief.

When we find an individual who can tell any horse's age to a certainty, as many of them claim to be able to do, we put him down at once as a man without much experience with horses. If we had the desire to "put across a good one" on anybody, this would be the type of man we would want to find. Any man who thinks he can tell the age of any horse or of all horses up to a certain age, is devoid of good common sense. There is only one way to definitely tell the age of a horse, and that is to learn the date it was foaled. However, there are several things that indicate a horse's age, with a fair degree of accuracy. In fact, they are constant enough that the average man can rely on them for all practical purposes. To the thinking man, the facts that we are going to give you will be proof enough of the correctness of our assertions.

IRREGULARITIES OF HORSES' TEETH.

We have all noticed in the members of the human family the great irregularity in the eruption or cutting of the teeth. In different individuals the same teeth will vary from several months to a year or even more; the same irregularity exists in the horse. The difference is not quite so great in the horse as the human, due no doubt to the great difference of the ages. It is possibly in proportion to the ratio between the average ages of the horse and man. We are personally aware of many cases in which the variation was at least a year.

The character of the composition of the teeth has also a marked influence. Some teeth are exceedingly hard. Others are correspondingly soft in structure. It would be unreasonable to suppose that with two horses having teeth with the above characteristics that they would present the same appearance and would indicate the same degree of wear. This one fact alone is of great importance. The animal with hard teeth, may, in some cases, be mistaken for a younger animal than he really is, and one with teeth that are soft in structure may be mistaken for an animal older than he really is.

The feeding habits and the class of feed, will also have a marked influence. Animals that are fed on good, tender blue-grass pasture would show very little wear of the teeth, while those fed on the coarse hard grass found in some of the sandy districts, may have teeth that are worn down smooth while yet quite young. This variation is quite marked. Animals that are fed on hard grains, such as flint corn and on tough, coarse hay, may also show this same condition, but not nearly so well marked. We have frequently inspected horses coming from the sand districts in the west, that had the greater part of the teeth worn away at a very early age, in some cases around six or seven years; these are known as "sand mouths."

The conformation of the animal's mouth may also have a great influence upon the appearance of the teeth. A horse with an over-shot or one with an under-shot jaw presents a mouth about which very little can be determined from looking at the teeth. This can very easily be accounted for since there is very little wear of the incisor teeth.

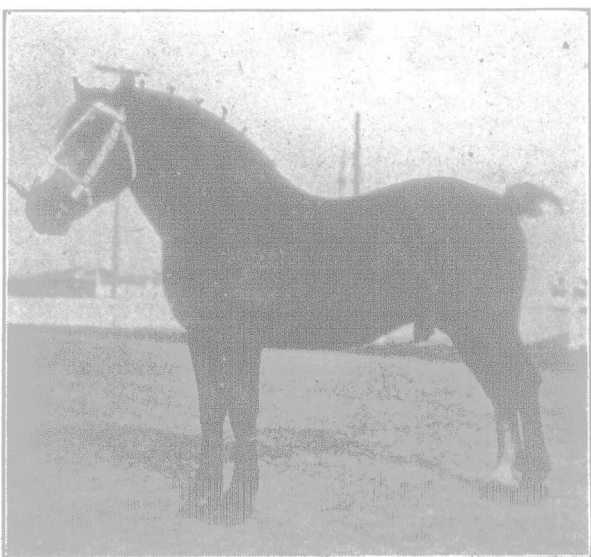
It is a well-known fact among horsemen that by the removal of a temporary tooth, the permanent one can usually be hastened several months in making its appearance. This fact is frequently taken advantage of, and many a horse is made to appear older than he really is.

There is still another practice that may be used to deceive one in determining the exact age of the horse, and we refer to "bishops." This consists in making the teeth of the animal appear as though belonging to a younger animal. The small cavity in the top of the tooth is known as a cup, and, as is well known, as the horse grows older the tooth wears and this cup disappears; it is the making of this artificial cup in the tooth that is known as "bishops." It is impossible to take

an old horse and make him appear several years younger from the appearance of the teeth in this manner and deceive the experienced horseman. It would be an easy matter, however, for an expert to take a young horse and make him appear one or two years younger, and would invariably deceive the majority of good horsemen.

The teeth of the horse under normal conditions are fairly regular in their eruption and the natural wear until the animal is eight or nine years of age. The animal should have a full mouth by the time he is five years old; however, this may vary a few months. After the animal has its permanent teeth, the age is then determined by the wear on the surface. For an individual to make any pretense of being able to determine an animal's age, with any degree of absolute certainty, is absurd. It is possible, in some cases, from the indications present to arrive at a decent estimate of the animal's age. If one is able to determine the difference at all times between an old horse and a young one, they have accomplished something that is of more than passing interest.

It might be well to remember that men who spend years in handling horses, and who handle many thousand each year, frequently feel that they have been mistaken in their judgment in ageing a horse. It would be folly for the individual who has a very limited experience to feel that he is an expert in this art. It requires an abundance of experience to acquire the art even as we have outlined it here.



Jasman.

First-prize three-year-old Percheron stallion at Toronto, 1920. Exhibited by Sir H. M. Pellatt, King City.

THE TEETH OF THE HORSE.

There are two complete sets of teeth in the horse; first comes the "temporary," "milk" or "foal" set. There is a marked difference in the two sets to the widely varying uses to which they are to be put. The temporary or milk tooth is small and white, and has a distinct neck and a short fang. These teeth are gradually pushed out of the jaw from the growth of the permanent teeth. The permanent teeth are larger, stronger and are browner in color; they have a long, stout fang, but no well-defined neck.

The part of the tooth that bites on the food or the opposite tooth is called the "table surface" or the "wearing surface." There is a blackened depression which is seen on this table surface and is known as the "mark" or the "cup." It is lined by a narrow white ring of enamel which can be easily felt with the finger. This mark is caused by the discoloration by the food. In young animals this cup is broad and deep, while in older ones it is narrow and shallow, gradually disappearing. It is the presence or absence of this cup in the various incisor teeth that is taken as an indication in arriving at the animal's age. The "crown" of the tooth is that part that is above the gum, and the "neck" is that part that is at the gum. The "fang" is that part within the jaw. The horse tooth continues to grow and to wear away until old age. The age of the draft horse is calculated from May 1.

By the term "rising" used in ageing a horse, we mean that he is nearly that age; that he will be that age soon, and on his next birthday. By "off" we mean that he has just passed that particular birthday.

THE NUMBER AND CLASS OF TEETH.

In the full-grown mare we have 36 permanent teeth, and in the male we find 40. This difference is due to the fact that in the male of the horse species "canine" teeth, or "tushes" usually appear at about five years of age; they are permanent teeth.

The teeth of the horse are known as "incisors" and "molars;" the molars are located on each side of the mouth, and are the grinding teeth; the incisors are located just behind the lips and are for biting purposes only.

There are six incisor teeth both in the temporary and permanent set; that is six in each jaw, both upper and lower, making 12 in all. The two middle incisors are known as "centrals," and the next pair as "laterals" while the outside pair are known as "corner" incisors. The "tush" that appears in the male at about five years of age is located just behind the "corner" incisors, about half way between the incisors and the molars. There are six molar teeth in each jaw, both upper and lower, and on both sides of the jaw; thus we have a

total of 24 molar teeth. In the temporary set of teeth we only have the first, second and third molar. The fourth, fifth and sixth are permanent teeth only. However, the molar teeth do not concern us, as indications of the animal's age. We depend solely upon the changes noticed in the incisor teeth for determining the age.

DETERMINING THE AGE.

The two thumbs are inserted in the horse's mouth just back of the incisor teeth; the fingers of the left hand rest on the animal's nose, while those of the right hand are closed about the horse's jaw. The grasp should be as firm as possible without annoying the horse. The operator should stand in front and a little to the side of the horse. By pressing down on the lower thumb the mouth can usually be opened very easily and a good view of the teeth can be had. Some horses do not permit this procedure without they are handled with care, and often it may be necessary to use the twitch or some other means of restraint. It is well to be always on the alert to prevent being injured.

In the young horse, the teeth meet in apposition. The surfaces are quite squarely brought together and the teeth leave the jaws at almost right angles. As the teeth are worn off and continue to grow outward they gradually assume more of a slope, and in very old horses they come together in the shape of a triangle. This is spoken of as the angle of the teeth.

The teeth of the young horse or until about six years of age, are much wider than they are thick. As the animal grows older, the shape gradually changes; they become circular in shape and in some very old horses they resemble a triangle to a great extent. This change first takes place in the central lower incisors and occurs at about six years of age. This change in shape is due to the wearing off of the table surface of the teeth and the pushing upward of the fang. The teeth in very old horses will be very small, and triangular or round on the table surface. For this reason it is impossible to "bishop" an old horse and deceive an expert horseman.

At about seven years of age, the rear corner of the upper "corner" incisor teeth shows a small projection as the rear of the tooth does not meet the lower tooth squarely; this is due to the wear on the tooth. It is a fairly accurate guiding mark, when it has not been removed. By some it has been called the "swallow tail."

At ten years a depression in the outer surface of the upper "corner incisor" appears at the junction of the gum and the tooth. This is about halfway down the tooth at 15 years of age, reaches to the bottom at about 20 years, is about half gone at 25 and has completely disappeared at 30. This is known as "Galvayne's" mark.

It is not uncommon to find many horses that have pastured in sandy country with heavy coarse grass to have teeth worn down so that no cups are to be seen. In some animals the teeth are very short, just reaching above the gums. The general shape of the contour of the tooth will indicate that the animal is quite young.

It is almost impossible to determine the age of a "crib-biter" with any accuracy, owing to the fact that the teeth are worn at such angle that the table surface of the teeth has been altered.

THE TEETH AT VARIOUS AGES.

In the young foal we usually find the two "central incisors" showing in each jaw at birth; if they are not present they appear within a very short time. The lateral incisors appear at about two months of age and the "corners" at from 6 to 8 months of age. Then at about eight months of age we would expect to find the foal with the temporary set of incisors. While they are all through the gums, they do not all show wear until about one year of age; at this age the corner incisor is usually showing some wear but the inner side is shelly in appearance, and has not grown down so that the tooth is in wear.

At from two to two and one-quarter years of age the central incisors begin to show evidence of being replaced by the permanent incisors. This usually takes place at about 2½ years, and by 3 years of age the teeth should be in wear. The "lateral" permanent incisors are cut at about 3½ years of age, and are in wear at 4 years. The "corner" permanent incisors are cut at about 4½ years and should be in wear by the 5th birthday.

The "tushes" are usually cut by the 5th birthday and are very sharp at first, but become quite rounded with age.

At six years of age the permanent incisor teeth should be in full wear. Looked at from the side, with the mouth closed, the teeth should appear upright and should meet each other squarely. However, the central teeth will show slightly more wear than the laterals and the laterals slightly more than the corners, as indicated by the contour of the table surface and the appearance of the cup.

CHANGES AFTER THE SIXTH YEAR.

At seven years of age the marks or cups in the central lower incisors have almost disappeared and those in the lateral incisors have shown considerable wear. The central incisors have changed considerably in shape, and have become more round. There is some little change in the shape of the "laterals" also.

At eight years of age the laterals have changed considerably in shape, losing much of their former elliptical shape and have almost lost their cups. The corners have begun to change and the cup has begun to disappear.

At nine years of age the cups in the upper central incisors have begun to disappear while they are almost gone from the corner lower incisors under normal conditions.

At ten years of age the lateral upper incisors show the