

## INTERVIEW WITH MEGHAN BRADY

*By Veronica Gogan*

Meghan Brady is well-versed in tension and asymmetry in horses, especially the common problem of poll tension. She specializes in sports massage, acupressure, craniosacral therapy, and myofascial release. Her equine clients include top sport horses, pleasure horses, OTTB, rescues, hippotherapy and therapeutic horses, and across English and Western disciplines. Her equine bodywork company, Equine Solutions, is based in Middleburg, VA and she also sees clients in Wellington, FL. Watching her work is fascinating. She shared her wealth of knowledge for this article.

Top equine athletes, retired seniors, stall rest layups, and pleasure horses almost all have one thing in common: tension at their poll by nature of their anatomy and human interaction. Their face, poll, and TMJ are all common ground for wearing halters. Bridles and bits, even in the most capable and lightest of hands, facilitate pulling and manipulation on their heads. The poll is a convergence of muscles, nerves, and joints; the crown piece of halters and bridles is mere millimeters away from that

sensitive spot. Performance horses may have body soreness because they're working and building muscle, pasture horses may be sore because they aren't moving as much as they should be. Each discipline has their own manifestations; a gymnast gets sore differently than a runner, dressage horses get sore differently than barrel horses. They all have one thing in common: poll tension. Bodywork is more than releasing the big muscles and major joints in a horse. Arguably, it's more about adjusting, balancing, and releasing the small muscles and delicate connections. It is an umbrella term for any therapeutic manipulation of the body including chiropractic and acupuncture, among others. Craniosacral therapy aims to improve the efficiency of biological processes by influencing movement of fluids in and around the central nervous system. Myofascial release targets the myofascia which is the tissue that encapsulates and connects muscles, prevents friction, and allows the muscles to power the body. When Meghan works with her equine clients, her philosophy is less is more, lighter is always better. Large animals do not necessitate a lot of pressure to release the soft

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tissue. They are flight animals, naturally they move away from pressure, they are trained to do so as well. Horses are intuitive to bodywork and know what their bodies need. If they need more, they allow and might even lean into the pressure.

The only exception to her rule is an initial evaluation which uses more pressure to see where the horse is reactive to touch; perhaps in the poll, cervical spine, back, rib cage, sacrum, glutes, or hamstrings. In the legs, palpation can expose heat, swelling, sensitivity, or limits to range of motion. Any reactivity reveals a noteworthy area. A walking observation reveals asymmetry. Does the barrel swing more to one side? Is one hip held higher? A standing evaluation shows if one shoulder is more developed, maybe the head is held a little crooked, or there is crookedness in the spine. It is important to see the whole horse from different angles.

In addition to the physical evaluation of the horse, it's important to Meghan to get a history of the horse including previous injuries and bodywork. His current

job, workload, and rider are also part of the complete picture. Every rider has their own imbalances and asymmetries which influences the horse differently. Perhaps the rider sits heavier on one seat bone or is stiffer in one shoulder, it's natural and inevitable. Meghan shared that most horses are dominant right front and left hind. This could be partly due to the fact that we do so much on their left sides and most people are right handed. Because it's more dominant, it carries more restrictions.

She strives to be invited into their world through touch. She is always on alert to what a horse may be trying to communicate. The first thing she looks for is blinking, especially rapid blinking. This indicates where she is working has something going on and she should keep at it. It may mean there is a release coming. Fidgeting may also be a sign that a horse is anticipating a change in their body. Horses show relaxation by licking, chewing, yawning, passing gas, pooping, drooling, and sheath dropping. Horses have been known to cat stretch, kick out, lay down, and even fall asleep! An OTTB from the CANTER program (Communication Alliance to Network Thoroughbred

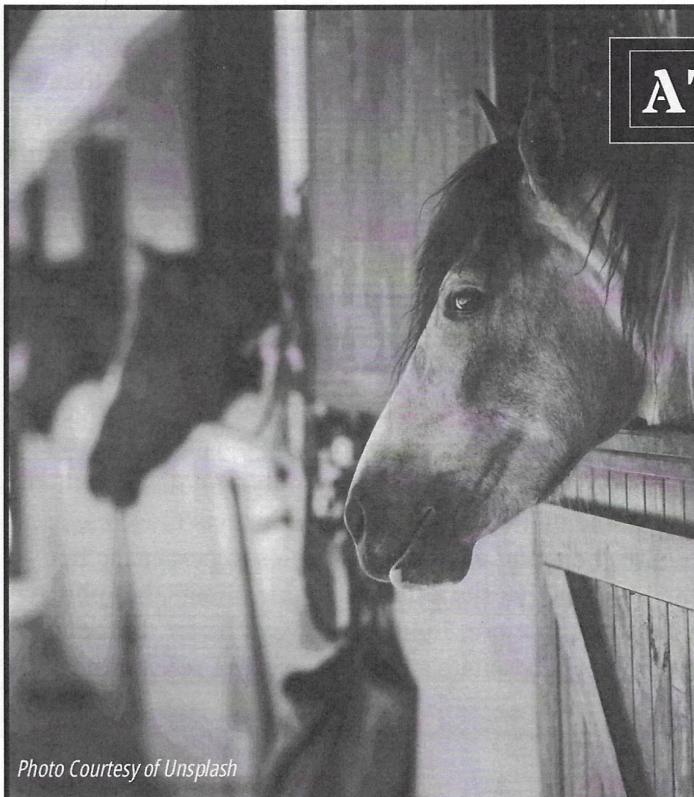


Photo Courtesy of Unsplash

## ATTENTION TRAINERS!

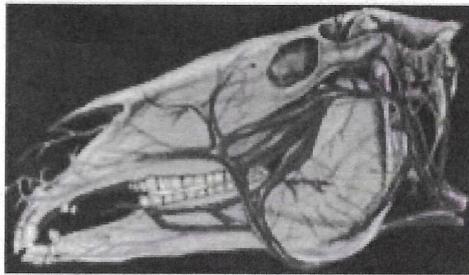
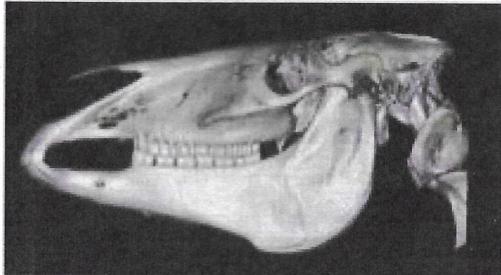
VADA/Nova would like to have a periodic article entitled, "Trainer's Tips." And for that we need your input! We need our professionals to submit articles addressing a riding/training problem and how you would address that issue.

Articles can be one to two pages; pertinent photos are welcome.

Deadlines for article submissions are the 15th of each month, so for example the deadline for the November newsletter is October 15.

If you would like to participate, please contact the Newsletter Editor, **Kathy Hibbard**, [newsletter@vadanova.org](mailto:newsletter@vadanova.org).

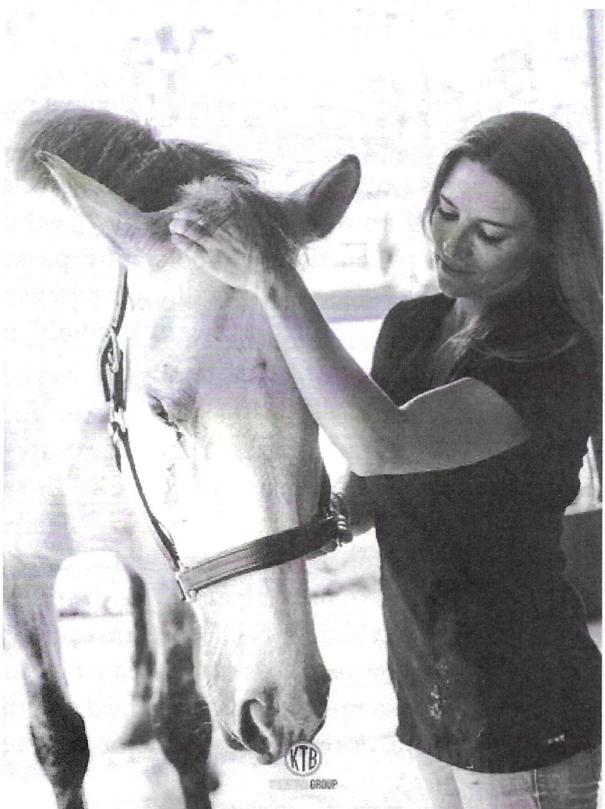
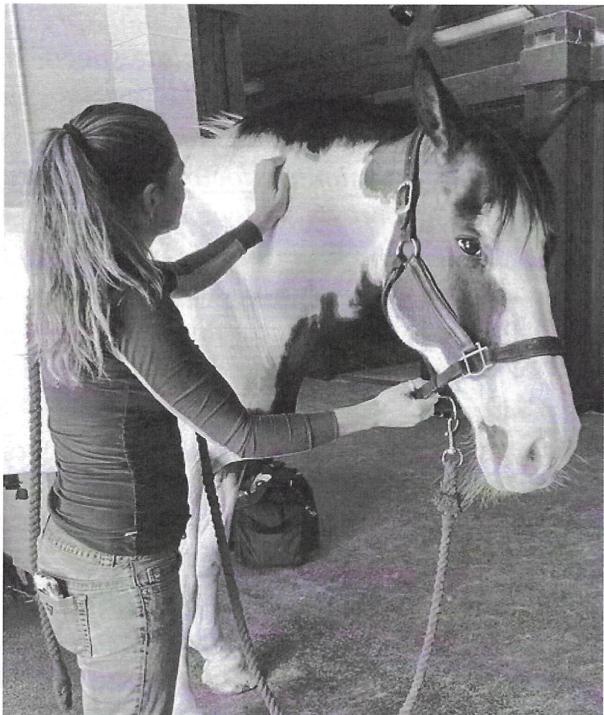
*We believe our members would love this addition to the newsletter; please help us make it happen!*



Ex-Racehorses) took several sessions before Meghan could even touch him. Over time, they developed an extraordinary bond where he would run to greet her for his sessions.

For Meghan, every treatment is a whole-body approach, always assessing and observing. Each horse and session are different depending on those findings. She may start with acupressure along the bladder meridian line as a way to relax the central nervous system. A fascinating technique she uses is called the hyoid release or tongue release. The equine jaw has several types of hyoid bones in the jaw around the tongue. By manipulating the tongue, the horse works their jaw in a unique, man-induced way so they self-adjust their jaw alignment. This sends synovial fluid to the TMJ joint which lubricates it. "It's a massage from the inside out," she says, "and it's great for poll tension."

Bodywork naturally complements the medical care horses receive. Meghan points out that high performing human athletes receive numerous alternative therapies to ensure their bodies work optimally and horses should be no different. She is also passionate that horses are always trying to communicate. She stresses the importance of getting to know your horse's behavior and getting them the help quickly when something is a little off. I highly recommend even a single bodywork session. I was amazed at how accurate Meghan's predictions were about my horse's way of going and my riding. Incorporating complementary therapies to your horse's regimen can only provide insight into his body and wellness. Find Meghan and My Equine Solutions at [www.myequinesolutions.com](http://www.myequinesolutions.com), Facebook, or Instagram. ■



#### PHOTOS:

*ACROSS TOP: Bone, Vessel, and Nerve Anatomy of Horse Head.  
Image courtesy of Dr. Hilary Clayton*

*TOP RIGHT: Massaging the Poll to release restrictions*

*BOTTOM RIGHT: Working along the bladder meridian with acupressure*