

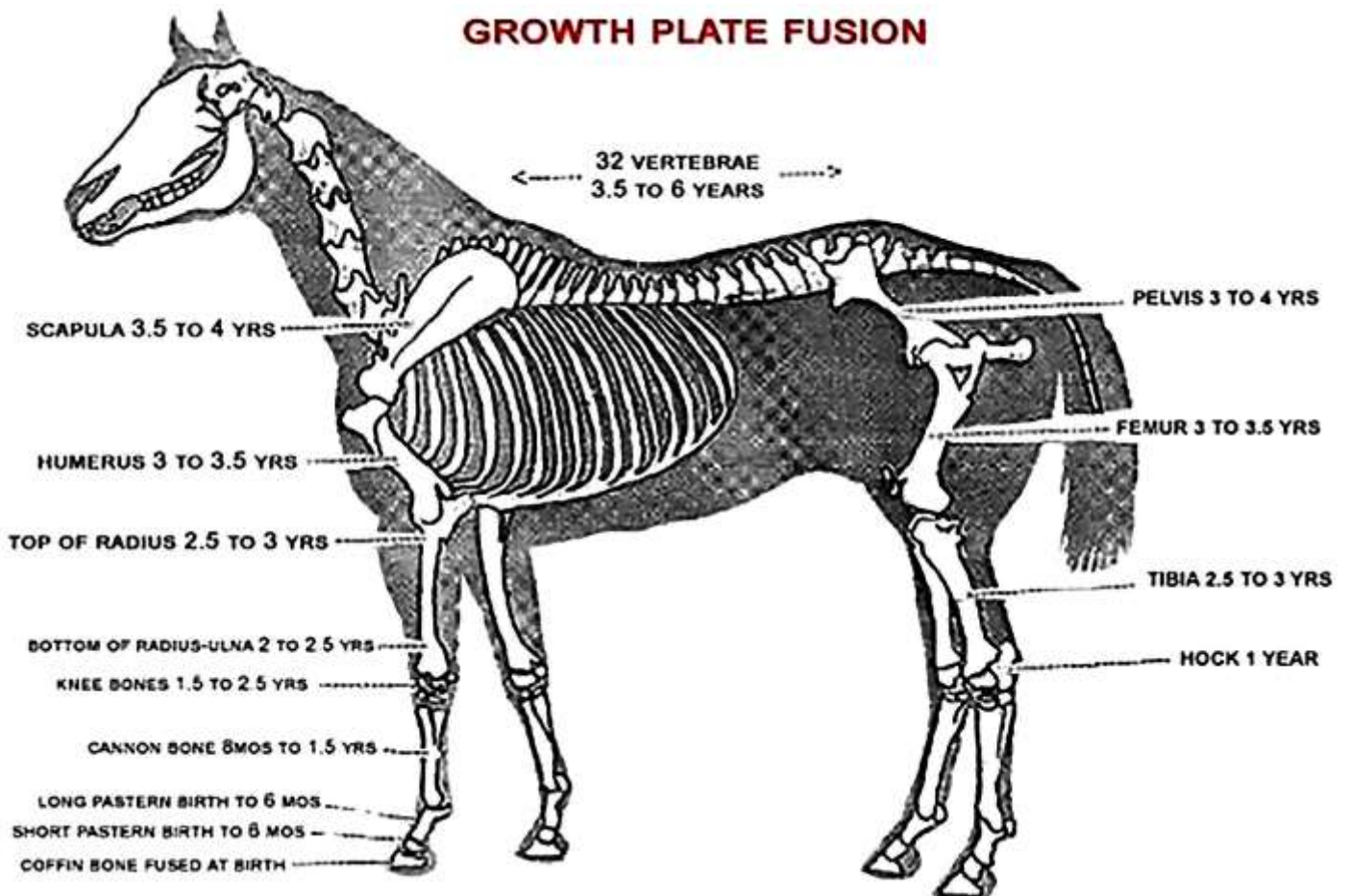
The stages of equine skeletal development

Since horses often look more mature than their bones can support, it makes it extra important for riders, drivers and trainers to keep the rate of growth plate fusion in mind as they increase work and expectations.

As shown in the illustration, and called out below, the process of growth plate fusion starts in the hooves and then moves upward over time. Interestingly, certain dimensions, such as the height of the coffin bone, are determined at birth.

This is a pretty sobering diagram when you think of how much we ask of young horses, whose bones are still growing and fusing! The last bones to fuse are the vertebral column, which takes at least 5 1/2 years or longer - male horses mature later and taller horses with longer necks also take longer.

According to Dr. Deb Bennett, this means that a 17-hand gelding may not be fully matured until they are 8, so make sure your young horses get plenty of turnout and don't be in a rush when training. Taking your time gives your horse the chance to mature from the inside out.



The STAGES of EQUINE SKELETAL DEVELOPMENT

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