
Contents

Acknowledgments	v		
Preface	vii		
Introduction	ix		
1 GAITED HORSES 101	1	3 HOW TO CHOOSE THE PERFECT (FOR YOU) GAITED HORSE	61
What Is a Gaited Horse?	1	A Common Scenario	61
The Gait Spectrum	3	Temperament	64
Diagonal Gaits	5	Soundness	70
Trot	5	Size and Conformation	76
Fox Trot	6	Manners under Saddle	76
Lateral Gaits	7	Smooth Gaiting Ability	77
Pace	7	Training and Experience	77
Stepping Pace	9	Type and Talent	79
Intermediate (Square) Gaits	9	The Right Price Is a Fair Price	82
Walk	9	4 CONFORMATION CONSIDERATIONS	87
Flat Walk	10	Conformed to Perform	87
Running Walk	11	Conformation and Movement	89
Rack	12	Forequarters: Shoulder and Arm	89
Speed Gaits	13	Stride Height and Length	89
Variations of Gait	14	Hindquarters: Hip and Thigh	94
Gaits “Off” the Spectrum	14	Loin Coupling and Gait Orientation	95
Canter and Gallop	14	General Conformational Considerations	96
Detrimental Effects of Specific Gaits	16	Overall Balance	96
What Gait Is My Horse Performing?	17	Hindquarters	96
		Back	98
		Head and Neck	100
		Other Conformational Considerations	102
2 BREEDS OF GAITED HORSES	21	5 BITS AND BITTING	109
Gaining in Popularity	21	Tacking Up for Success	109
American Saddlebred Horse	22	Bits	110
Tennessee Walking Horse	26	Snaffle Bits	111
Missouri Fox Trotting Horse	37	Curb Bits	113
Icelandic Horse	40	Understanding Effective Curb	
Peruvian Horse	46	Bit Design	114
Paso Fino	52	Specialized Bits and Bridles	118
Recently Founded Breed Registries	56	Proper Bit Adjustment	121
Mountain Horse	56		
Spotted Saddle Horse	58		
Other Gaited Breeds	59		

6 SADDLE FIT AND DYNAMICS	123	Flexion	172
The Rider's Seat Position	123	Exercise 1: Lateral Neck Bending	172
How a Saddle Can "Make or Break"		Exercise 2: Lateral Body Bending	173
a Horse	126	Exercise 3: Head Lowering	
Saddle Dynamics	127	and Neck Stretching	178
Unique Action of the Gaited		Developing the Ability for Collection	180
Horse's Back	128	Exercise 4: Conscious Collection	180
Saddle Fit	130	Exercise 5: Walking over Poles	181
Saddle Tree Terms	130	Exercise 6: Rollback	181
Western Saddles	133	Exercise 7: Teaching Transitions	183
English Saddles	133	Benefits of Lateral Exercise for	
Australian Saddles	135	the Gaited Horse	185
Trooper Saddles	136	Exercise 8: Shoulder-Fore	
Treeless Saddles	136	and Shoulder-In	186
Flexible Panel Saddles	137	Exercise 9: Haunches-Fore	
Evaluating Saddle Dynamics and Fit	138	and Haunches-In	187
Primary Considerations	138	Additional Schooling Resources	188
Testing for Freedom of Motion	140		
Corrective Padding	141	9 SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS	189
Devising a Suitable Saddle System	143	Be Prepared for Challenges	189
		Rider Issues	191
7 BASIC TRAINING	145	Gaited Equitation Skills	191
First Lessons	145	Behavioral Problems	195
Yielding to Pressure	145	Rushing and Barging	195
Teaching Composure and Patience	147	Herd Bound	203
Early Ground Training	148	Barn Sour	204
Round-Pen Work	148	Spooking and Balking	205
Line-Driving	151	Tongue over Bit or Hanging	
Carriage Driving	155	out of Mouth	207
Early Saddle Training	156	Physical Issues	209
End of Second Year	156	Locked Stifle	209
Three-Year-Old	158	Hollow (Swayed) Back	215
Less Can Be More	160	Gait Issues	219
Early Gait Training	162	Lazy Forward Motion	219
Techniques for Obtaining Flat Walk	163	"Camel Walk"	222
The Flat Walk	163	Stumbling	223
Adjustments in Contact	164	Forging	225
The Importance of Conditioning	164	Pacing and Step Pacing	226
Four-Year-Old	166	Trotting and Slick Trotting	232
Cantering	167		
Should the Gaited Horse Trot?	169	Appendix A: Optimal Hoof Care	
		for the Gaited Horse	234
8 ADVANCED SCHOOLING	171	Appendix B: Resources	239
The Importance of "Supple" and "Soft"	171	Index	241

How Forequarter and Hindquarter Angles Affect Gait

By understanding how the angles of the forequarters and hindquarters affect the horse's movement, it becomes possible to determine the gaits the horse will naturally perform based on that information. But keep in mind that other conformational factors play equally important roles in determining gait—these are discussed through the remainder of this chapter.

- **RUNNING WALK** A horse with an open angle between his shoulder and arm will take short-to-medium length, high-lifting strides with his forelegs (fig. 4.3). As he increases speed a moment of suspension will appear between one forefoot picking up and the other setting down. This gives the impression he is “trotting in front.” When this horse also has a closed angle between his hip and thigh, he will have a long, low, sweeping hind stride, giving the appearance of “walking behind.” A horse that appears to be “trotting in front and walking behind” is performing a running walk (see p. 11).
- **FOX TROT** A horse with a closed angle between his shoulder and arm will have minimal stride height and a long stride length in front, with little or no suspension between one foot picking up and the other setting down (fig. 4.4). He will, therefore, appear to be “walking in front.” The open angle between his hip and thigh gives him a high stride height in back, with short stride length, and there will be a distinct period of suspension between one hind foot picking up and the other setting down. This gives the impression that he is “trotting behind.” A horse that appears to be “walking in front and trotting behind” is performing a fox trot (see p. 6).

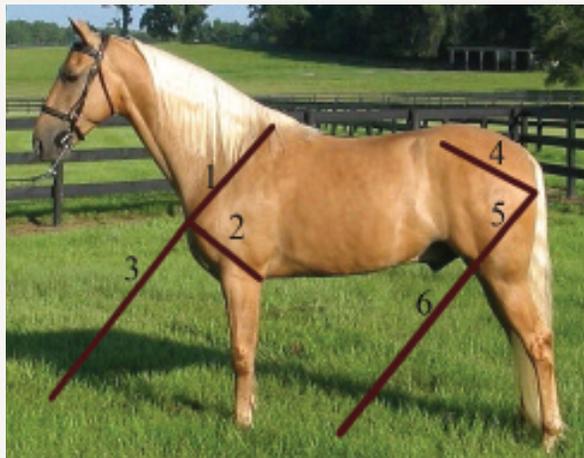


4.3 This Tennessee Walking Horse mare's steep shoulder and vertical arm combine for an open angle of 85 degrees in front, indicating she will have moderate stride height and stride length. There is a 70-degree (closed) angle between the hip and stifle, giving her a long, low stride behind. This, combined with a short back, permits the horse to stride deeply beneath herself and perform a running walk with considerable overstride. Horses built so that their body and legs form a box shape with long legs and a short back are most likely to have an overstride.

- RACK** A horse with equal, or nearly equal, angles in the forequarters and hindquarters will have similar length and height of stride in his front and hind legs (fig. 4.5). Such horses perform a variation of the rack (see p. 12)—which particular variation is determined by whether the angles are closed, open, or average. When closed, the gait will be one with high (flashy) stride height and short-to-medium stride length. Open angles give the horse a long stride with minimal lift—such horses are called “daisy clippers” (fig. 4.6). Average angles result in moderate stride height and stride length.



4.4 (Top) The lovely Missouri Fox Trotting stallion Prince Moon Beam has a 70-degree (closed) angle in front, giving him a long, low sweeping stride. The 90-degree angle between his hip and stifle give him moderate height of stride, with average length of stride. A longer, lower stride in front with a shorter, more lifting stride in back is the signature of a true fox-trot gait.



4.5 (Middle) The nearly equal and moderate angles in front (90 degrees) and behind (80 degrees) suggest this horse will rack with moderate stride height and length in the forehand, with a slightly less high and longer stride behind.

4.6 (Bottom) *Paso Fino* means “fine step”, which is a short-strided, low-slung gait. The closed 70-degree angles of the fore- and hindquarters indicate this Paso Fino will perform the “daisy-clipping” gait for which the breed is known.



As you “catch and hold” the energy generated from the haunches to your bridle, you will begin to feel the horse round-up through the back and become lighter on the bit.

Developing the Ability for Collection

I call the next exercise “Conscious Collection” because it helps the rider be very aware of his relationship to the horse when the horse is brought up to and ridden in a light, collected frame. While this frame can be developed using the simple half-halt techniques described earlier (see p. 159), devoting time exclusively to developing roundness and collection helps the rider focus more closely on the job at hand.

Exercise 4

CONSCIOUS COLLECTION

Begin this work only when your horse is responding well to all parts of the three exercises discussed previously. Start with the neck-stretching and head-lowering exercises on a large circle or straight line. Use your seat and legs to push the horse vigorously forward while shortening the reins to encourage him to bring his head up to the bit and flex at the poll.

At a vigorous walk, perform several half-halts, taking up slightly more rein with each one. Be careful not to “pump” the reins with your arms as this negates the energy generated from the haunches with each stride. Instead, give only a slight amount with your elbows and hands in time to the action of the horse’s head. I tell my riding students to imagine they have a 3-inch-long bungee cord tied to their elbow and their waist (see p. 193). This gives you just enough latitude to be soft, but not so much as to defeat the purpose of maintaining the horse in good form.

As you “catch and hold” the energy generated from the haunches to your bridle, you will begin to feel the horse round-up through the back and become lighter on the bit. Once you achieve this and maintain it for several strides, lengthen the reins and allow the horse to stretch out.

Repeat this process two or three times, lengthening the time you ask your horse to maintain collection each time you ride. At first, just a minute or two is all that should be expected. Within a month, the young horse might hold a good frame for eight-to-ten minutes at a time. Start at a dog

walk and increase speed and collection to a working walk, and then proceed to practice collection at a flat walk. During the horse's third year you should not yet attempt this exercise at a running walk or rack, as working in collected form in these saddle gaits takes months of conditioning and practice. Be sure to mix up this position with lots of easy, slow walking (not collected) because the horse may start to become tense if not permitted to relax and stretch out intermittently.

Exercise 5

WORKING OVER POLES

By the *end of his third year* you can begin to work your horse over poles. This is useful because it helps prevent extremely lateral timing at the working and flat walk—if your horse tends to be pacey, working him over poles helps “square” him up. This exercise also teaches him to look where he is going and to lift his legs high enough to clear obstacles without stumbling.

Again, use poles at least 10 feet long and heavy enough so your horse can't easily knock them around. Landscape timbers work well, and are easy to acquire at any building supply or landscaping retailer. I space the poles out approximately one-and-a-half times the length of the horse's body, from chest to point of buttock—on average, this is about a 10-foot distance. Usually, this length accommodates your horse's stride but if you find him tripping often, or if he has to shorten stride as he approaches the poles, experiment to discover the distance that works best (fig. 8.7).

Each time you approach the lineup of poles, give a strong half-halt. Your horse will look down to see where to place his feet, which causes his back to round and his neck to flex—actions that are beneficial. A word of caution: If your horse tends to be “trotty,” limit this pole schooling to a working walk, as riding fast over ground poles encourages diagonal gaits.

Exercise 6

ROLLBACK

At a working walk, cue the horse to perform a 180-degree spin (turn) toward the wall or rail. This turn brings the horse so close to the obstacle

that to avoid running into it he is forced to “roll” his weight rearward and pivot over his inside hind leg.

The rollback is an excellent exercise to help increase your horse’s balance, strength, and agility, and sets his body in an excellent frame for correctly performing his smooth saddle gaits. Like all schooling exercises, it should be performed in both directions.

For a rollback to the left, position your horse 6 or 7 feet away from a wall or rail on your left—leave just enough room so that he is forced, when executing the turn, to shift his weight rearward and roll over his hindquar-

Neck Reining

Most of the exercises suggested in this chapter must be performed using a *direct rein*, (though you can neck rein your horse through a rollback). While a horse doesn’t need to be taught to neck rein (*indirect rein*), it is a handy skill for him to have, especially when you ride out on the trail. The neck rein is actually a combination of seat and leg aids, as well as “guiding” the horse with a rein along his neck. To teach the neck rein to the right:

- Hold one rein in each hand, focus on an object on the right you want to turn toward, and begin walking.
- Pull your horse’s nose toward the object with your right rein with a *leading rein* (see p. 157) while giving enough with the left rein to permit the horse’s nose to turn to the right.
- Move your left hand forward, and lay the rein across your horse’s neck halfway between the withers and poll. Do not *pull* on the rein; just lay it across his neck.
- Use your left leg slightly behind the girth to “push” your horse to the right while keeping your right leg passive at the girth.
- When the horse begins the turn, release pressure on the right rein and continue guiding him using only left rein and your leg and seat aids. If he becomes confused, take up your right rein again.
- Practice neck reining to the other side by “mirroring” these aids.

I like to practice neck reining on the trail where I use it to negotiate around practical objects—horses learn faster if the exercise makes *sense* to them. This training becomes an unconscious practice, until one day I just find myself holding the reins in one hand and expecting my horse to neck rein in whatever direction I want him to go!

ters through the turn. Ask for an active walk and when you approach the end of the rail, cue strongly for a halt (see p. 159). When your horse has stopped, *immediately* use your right leg at the girth to “push” the horse toward the wall while taking on your left rein (which should be lowered to just above your knee) to ask for a turn in that direction. Be sure to release enough of your right rein to permit the turn. (You may choose to neck rein through the turn—see sidebar, p. 182.)

Immediately after the turn your horse will be in excellent collected form, with a great deal of energy coming from his hindquarters and a “lightened” front end. This is an ideal time to ask for more speed, in gait. You do so by maintaining contact on the reins and *vigorously* pushing the horse forward with your seat and legs as soon as he has made the turn. Do not allow him to lose form or momentum.

Exercise 7

TEACHING TRANSITIONS

Developing the horse’s ability to perform clean transitions from one gait to another, in good form, and from specific cues, is our next step. This begins in the horse’s *fourth year*. It requires a lot of physical development and strength from the horse and attentive riding from the rider to teach a horse to respond in this manner. You cue for the speed you want by lengthening and shortening stride.

First, teach the horse to *extend* his stride on demand while maintaining collection, without breaking the four-beat pattern of footfalls (fig. 8.8 A). This causes the horse to smoothly transition up into a nicely collected, smooth saddle gait. To smoothly transition down to a slower gait, teach him to *shorten* his stride while still moving with engagement and forward energy. (Again, this collected work can be overdone, so give the horse regular



8.7 Working over poles helps even-up the timing of the horse’s gait, makes him more surefooted, and helps him engage his haunches.



8.8 A & B Lengthening the horse's stride while maintaining contact on the bridle is an important element of training for your horse's best natural gait (A). To slow the gait, maintain contact and increase collection by giving less with your seat and hands (B). This shortens the horse's stride, but does not sacrifice good form.

breaks, allowing him to stretch out at a relaxing dog walk with minimal contact on the bridle.) These exercises can be practiced on the trails as well as in a more structured environment.

Part One: Upward Transitions

Move out at an active walk and ask the horse to collect. Perform a half-halt or two to get the horse “coiled for action.” Now energetically press the horse forward with your seat and legs while using an easy give-and-take action on the reins, in time with the motion of the head and neck. Your shoulders should have some roll. Don't “pump” the reins, but allow them to actively follow the action of the horse's head and neck. You don't want to hinder this action because doing so creates tension throughout the horse's body, making it impossible for him to stay softly collected and relaxed.

If the horse breaks into the trot, or pace, or if he maintains the correct pattern of footfalls but stiffens up and loses his collected frame, try a half-halt to see if you can recollect and correct him. If that doesn't work, bring him back down to walk and repeat the exercise. If you practice diligently you'll suddenly feel as though you are effortlessly moving across the

ground at a speed that is definitely faster than a normal walk. When you achieve this, allow the horse to remain at this gait and speed for a couple of minutes, just so he develops some neural and muscle memory from the experience.

Depending on your horse's natural gait inclinations, this early gait will likely be a flat walk or slow fox trot. At this point in training, developing speed is not on the agenda—your goal is to teach him to respond to your cues for collecting and extending stride. Speed is built from this foundation.