

GAITS OF A HORSE

The rhythmic characteristic movement of a horse's feet and legs in motion are called gaits. The three natural gaits of the horse are the walk, trot, and gallop. The rack and slow gait of the American Saddle horse, running walk of the Tennessee Walking horse, and the pace of the Standardbred may be natural or acquired. A natural gait is one that is performed by natural impulse and without training. The acquired gaits are the result of specific training and practice. The acquired gaits are the canter, rack, and the slow gaits. The slow gaits are the stepping pace, the running walk, the fox trot, and the amble.

WALK

The walk is a slow, natural, flat footed, four beat gait. Each foot takes off from and strikes the ground independently of the other three feet. It is known as the foundation gait, as the horse may be asked to change to other gaits while working at the walk. The sequence of hoof beats after the horse is in motion can be described according to this pattern: right fore, left rear, left fore, right rear. Although a natural gait, it is one that can be improved with training.

The horse must move straight and true at the walk. The feet of the straight moving horse point and move in the exact direction the horse travels. This horse moves efficiently as the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The walk must show vigor and be brisk, with a stride of reasonable length in keeping with the size of the horse. The American Saddle horse must pick up his feet with energy, displaying a proud walk. His ankles and knees are easily flexed, while the hocks should be carried well under his body producing high action and animation. Horses with a short, stubby stride are rough to ride and are more prone to soreness and other faults. Horses whose hind hoof prints contact or over-reach the front hoof prints have good length of stride and absorb more road shock than those having shorter strides. Horses with a longer stride move with less effort in covering greater distance.

At the walk a horse has never more than three nor less than two feet bearing weight at the same time, making

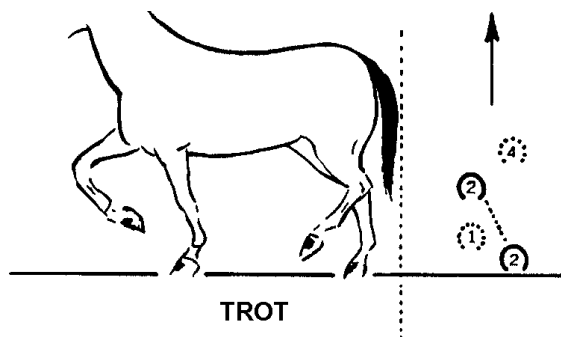
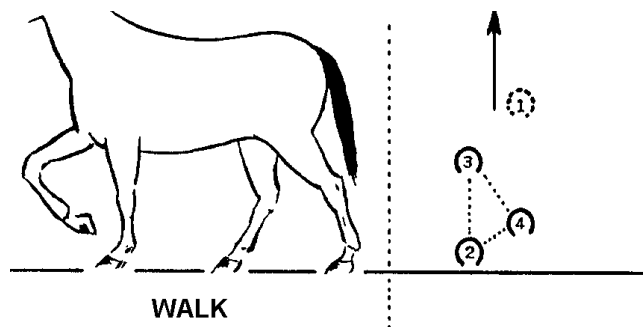
up a triangular base of support. A well trained horse should walk at least four miles an hour.

TROT

The trot is a rapid two beat diagonal gait. The forefoot on one side and the opposite hind foot take off and strike the ground at the same time. The horse works from one pair of diagonals to the other pair. The weight of the horse is distributed first by one diagonal and then the opposite diagonal. Then all four feet are off the ground at the same time for a moment. The trot should be square balanced and springy with a straight forward movement of the feet. The Hackney displays the collected trot with extreme flexion of knees and hocks that produces a high stepping gait. The Standardbred exhibits the extended trot with length and rapidity of individual strides. The jog-trot is a slow, smooth, ground covering gait exhibited in western classes.

CANTER

The canter is an easy rhythmical three beat gait. It is not a straight forward gait as the walk, but is a slight diagonal movement, either right or left. It is executed with either a right or left "lead". The independent moving front leg is the "lead". The horse has a hind lead that corresponds to the front lead. A horse that leads with the left front and also with the left hind is coordinated. This can be observed by looking over the horse's shoulder and observing which front leg reaches farthest ahead in the stride. The canter starts with one hind foot striking the ground, then the other hind foot and diagonal front foot strike the ground together followed by the remaining front foot striking the ground. The hoof beats of a horse cantering correctly to the left are (1) right hind, (2) the diagonal left hind and right front together, and (3) left front. The correct sequence of beats in cantering to the right are (1) left hind, (2) the diagonal right hind and left front together, and (3) right front. The two unpaired legs that beat alone bear more weight and are subject to more strain than the diagonal legs that beat together. The lead should be changed at intervals because of the added strain on the legs and feet



that strike separately. A horse can execute a sharper turn with greater ease and start quicker if he leads with the inside (correct) leg lead. The lope is a medium fast, collected canter exhibited in western classes.

GALLOP OR RUN

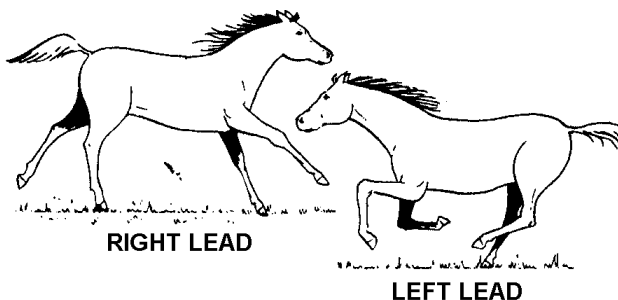
The gallop is generally considered as a fast, three beat gait. The sequence of hoof beats is similar to that of the canter. A hind foot makes the first beat, followed by the other hind foot and diagonal front foot striking together, and the remaining front foot makes the third beat. (Study of film in slow motion indicates the rear diagonal foot strikes the ground slightly before the front diagonal foot). The horse is thrust clear of the ground and a hind foot makes the first beat in a new series. The horse should change both front and hind leads at the same time during the period of suspension after the lead front leaves the ground. The drive develops mainly from the hind legs, however, the front legs are subject to considerable concussion. The gallop in an extended form is known as the run.

STEPPING PACE

This is a slow, lateral, four beat gait. Each of the four feet strike the ground at separate intervals. In the take off, the lateral hind and front feet start almost together, but the hind foot strikes the ground ahead of the front foot on the same side. The horse moves with his weight well back on the hind quarters and with high action in front. It is a modified pace without the rolling action of the true pace. The sequence of beats is right hind, right front, left hind, and left front. This is the fourth gait of five-gaited show horses.

RUNNING WALK

This is a natural slow gait of the Tennessee Walking horse. It is a diagonal four beat gait. Each foot takes off and strikes at separate intervals with the front foot striking the ground before the diagonal hind foot. The hind quarters propel the horse in motion. The hind feet



over-reach the front feet from several to over 36 inches producing a smooth gliding motion. This gait is very comfortable to both horse and rider. Front action is desired with little hock action, as this would prevent his long overstep and characteristic walk. The Walking horse must flick his ears, nod his head, and chomps his bit in rhythm with his action to be genuine. Normal travel expected of the horse is 7 to 8 miles per hour.

FOX TROT

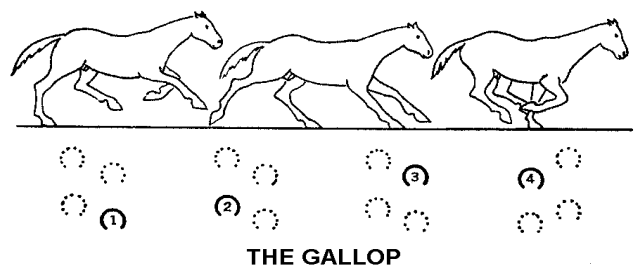
This gait is a slow, short, broken, somewhat uncollected nodding trot. The hind foot strikes the ground an instant before the diagonal front foot. It is not as comfortable to ride as the running walk or the stepping pace.

AMBLE

The amble is a lateral gait. It is different from the pace by being slower and more broken in cadence. It is not a show gait. The hind foot may land slightly before the fore foot.

RACK

The rack is a fast, flashy, evenly timed, four beat gait. The feet start and stop at the same intervals of time of each other. The sequence of beats is similar to the sequence of the stepping pace. It is characterized by considerable knee action and extreme speed. The squatting form and climbing action of the stepping pace are apparent. The front legs appear to trot and hind legs appear to be pacing with rather stiff back action. The gait must be performed with ease and grace and ample height too) the stride but with form and action maintained. Speed is not as necessary for the 3-gaited horse as it is for the five-gaited horse. The horse can rack for only several minutes without breaking as practically every muscle is used in the gait. It is an easy gait to ride. It is the fifth gait requested of the American Saddle horse.

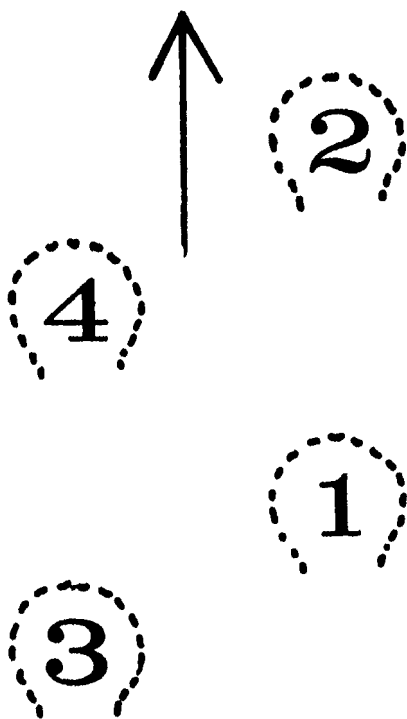


PACE

The pace is a fast, two beat gait. The front and hind feet on the same side start and stop at the same time. The feet rise little above the ground. All four feet are off the dirt for a moment. The base of support is always on the two lateral legs. Pacers have the ability to start quickly at considerable speed. The pace does not produce the concussion evident in the gallop or run. It produces more or less side or rolling motion. The pace is a speed gait rather than a road gait.

IMPORTANT FEATURES OF A STRIDE

- 1) Balance - the ability of a horse to control his action in order to travel collectedly and in correct form.
- 2) Directness - the line in which the foot is carried during the stride.
- 3) Height - the amount of foot elevation in the stride, determined by the radius of the arc described.
- 4) Length - the distance from the point of breaking over in preparation for flight in a stride to the point of surface contact of the same foot.
- 5) Rapidity - the time used in taking one stride.
- 6) Regularity - the precision sequence with which each stride is taken in turn.



THE STEPPING PACE

DEFINITIONS

Diagonal gait - is one in which the front foot and opposite hind foot take off and stop at the same time. The legs and feet move in diagonal pairs in performing the gait. (Trot)

Easy gaited - is the expression used when the rider's reactions to a horse's gaits are pleasant and enjoyable.

Free Going - is the expression used when horses gaits are executed in a smooth, collected manner, and action is not excessive or labored.

Rough or Hard gaited - is the expression used when the stride lacks spring or action, therefore causing unnecessary rider fatigue.

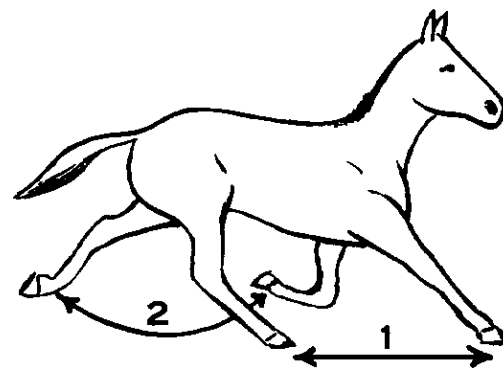
Flashy or High gaited - refers to the action when a horse folds his knees, with the forearm nearly horizontal momentarily, flexes the hock noticeably, and lifts his body high from the ground.

Lateral gait - the legs and feet move in lateral pairs in performing the gait. The front and hind feet on the same side of the horse start and stop at the same time. (Pace)

Labored action - is the term used when a horse's action in motion is difficult to perform and plainly excessive.

Action - the characteristic stride in which the horse lifts his front and hind feet very high, flexing or bending his knees and ankles.

Stride - the distance from imprint to imprint by a horse's foot when completing one step.



THE PACE

DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR HORSE WALKING.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.