

Online HorseCollege



Student Workbook

2.R.05 Riding a Horse in Walk

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Introduction

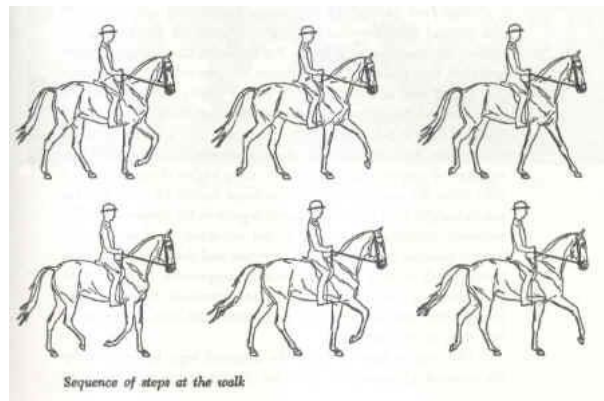
Gaits are the different ways in which a horse can move and in these gaits the legs will move in different sequences.

There are 4 'natural' gaits which are walk, trot, canter and gallop.

An example of a breed which has breed inherited and trained gaits is the Standardbred which have been developed for pacing (racing industry).

The Walk

The slowest of the four paces it has four beats and no moment of suspension meaning, there is always at least 1 hoof on the ground. The head of the horse will bob up and down slightly in time with the motion.



Footfalls-

Right hind leg, right front leg, left hind leg, left front leg

Aids

Riding aids are the cues you use when you ride to communicate to the horse what you want it to do. These aids are broken into two categories, Natural aids and Artificial Aids. Natural aids are those cues given using the riders' body. Artificial aids are cues which reinforce the natural aids. How a horse responds to these aids will depend upon the type and level of training the horse has had and the ability of the rider.

A horse with a good education should be 'on the aids' meaning that it will respond to an aid immediately when it is applied. A horse which is 'on the aids' can also become slow off the aids or 'dead to the aids' (a common expression is 'dead to the leg' meaning that the horse doesn't respond to or is difficult to respond to leg aids) this usually occurs when the horse is ridden by a person of less experience who gives the horse contradicting aids for example asking the horse for trot and because the horse is quicker to respond than anticipated by the rider, the rider pulls on the reins and brings the horse back to walk.

A horse which is 'off the aids' is one which is slow to respond or requires strong aids from the rider before they will react. This is not always a bad thing, for example a horse which is slow to respond will be appropriate for a beginner rider who may accidentally kick or bump the horse with the leg.

Natural Aids



Leg Aid-

A leg aid is used either on or just behind the girth, depending on what you are asking for. Leg aids are used to ask for forward or sideways motion and control the placement of the body and hind legs. The leg is positioned with the toe pointing forward so the inside of the lower leg lies flat against the horse.



Hand/Rein Aids-

Your hands give aids via the rein to the bit in the horses' mouth. Reins are used as either a restraining aid or a guiding aid and can control the direction and the speed of travel and at a more advanced level, the placement of the head and shoulders. The hands should be positioned just above the horses' withers with the fingers closed around the rein and thumbs on top.

Aids (cont.)

Natural Aids (cont.)



Seat and Weight Aids-

These aids can take a long time to develop as the rider needs to learn to balance and follow the horses' movement without bouncing or interfering first. The seat can be used as a restraining or driving aid whilst weight aids are used to position the horses' body.



Voice-

Voice cues are used mostly when lunging. Whilst sometimes the voice may be used whilst training, for example 'clucking' to encourage a horse, in dressage tests you can be penalised for it.

Artificial Aids



Spurs-

Are worn on a riders' heel and are used to re-enforce a leg aid. The spur should never be used as punishment and only be used by experienced riders.



Whip-

Held in either hand a dressage whip is used behind the riders' leg to re-enforce a leg aid, not as punishment.



Crop/Cane-

Held in either hand a crop is a short whip used on the shoulder to re-enforce the leg aid, not as punishment.

Aids for Walk

Firstly we will look at the aids given to a horse which is on the aids and responds well to the rider.

- To perform a transition into walk from halt firstly the rider keeps the weight evenly distributed on both seat bones with the upper body tall.
- Then simultaneously the rider increases the weight on the seat bones by tightening the abdominal and back muscles (this motion should cause the pelvis to tilt slightly backwards, a similar action you would use to tilt a chair forward if you were sitting on the edge of it) at the same the lower leg is applied on the girth whilst;
- The hands yield enough with the rein to allow the horse to walk but still maintain a soft contact with the mouth (i.e. no loop or excessive slack in the reins).

Once walking the rider follows the movement created by the horses' back by allowing the hips to move with the motion (this will be a forward-back-forward-back movement with the hips). The lower leg stays in contact with the horses' sides, however not squeezing or gripping as this may cause confusion to the horse which may result in the horse speeding up or ignoring the leg aids.

The aids for a horse which is slow off the aid or for a horse which might be a little young and/or uneducated (green) can be as follows:-

- The rider keeps the weight evenly distributed on both seat bones with the upper body tall.
- Simultaneously the rider increases the weight on the seat bones by tightening the abdominal and back muscles (this motion should cause the pelvis to tilt slightly backwards) at the same the lower leg is applied on the girth whilst;
- The hands yield enough with the rein to allow the horse to walk but still maintain a soft contact with the mouth (i.e. no loop or excessive slack in the reins).
- If the horse is unresponsive the rider needs to repeat the aids however this time the aids will be applied a little stronger. If the horse still remains unresponsive it is at this time you would reinforce your natural aids with an artificial aid. The artificial aid is applied lightly at first and if the horse still doesn't respond it is applied a little stronger. You will need to repeat the aids until you get the correct response from the horse.

A horse which is slow off the aids can become responsive by the rider being consistent with how the aids are given and used. If a rider always uses the aids in correct sequence then the horse will begin to understand and anticipate that ignoring the request will not make them more comfortable.

However if the rider is inconsistent with how the aid is given and how they respond when the horse is unresponsive then the horse will remain slow off the aids because there is structure to the corrections given by the rider.



Aids for Halt

The aids for halt are applied in the following manner:-

- 1) placing more weight onto the seat bones by using stronger back muscles whilst
- 2) pushing the horse slightly forwards with the leg and
- 3) using a measured amount of asking or a non-yielding rein which is
- 4) immediately followed by a yielding rein when the horse responds.

The reason the horse is pushed slightly forward with the leg is because the forward pushing leg aid pushes the horse into the non-yielding rein. The non-yielding rein tells the horse it cannot go forward so the horse slows down.

The rein should not be used with a pulling effect; it is more difficult for a horse to slow down if the rider pulls excessively on the reins.

When applying the aids for halt (on a responsive horse) the amount of leg and rein aids you apply should be roughly the same, if one outweighs the other the horse will either keep walking or raise its head in the air.

If the rein isn't yielded when the horse responds and comes into halt it may be inclined to start to rein back; meaning step/walk backwards.



Troubleshooting & Tips

With the walk transition:-

Common problems arise in the walk when the hands or legs are used incorrectly.

If the hands are too strong when a horse is asked to walk the horse is likely to step backwards or toss its head up or down.

If the legs are applied too strong the horse may move into trot or even canter.

Sometimes the horse will walk on but may be a little slow. As the rider you need to make sure you follow the horse's natural head movement in walk so that you allow the horse to walk with your hands and rein. The horse's head and neck will nod up and down as it walks so your arms and hands need to follow this movement by moving forward-back-forward-back. This means that as the horse's head nods down your arms will give forwards from the shoulders and elbows and as the horse's head nods up your elbows bend (this is not a pulling backwards action). The contact on the reins should remain the same whilst you do this.

To increase a slow horse's speed in walk you need to apply the same aids as those applied to move the horse from halt to walk. If the horse is unresponsive you will need to follow the same pattern, that is, to reapply the natural aids slightly stronger and if necessary reinforce them with an artificial aid.

Rigid hands and constant pushing with the leg can create a horse which is 'dead to the aids' and can cause a lateral walk where the horse moves the legs in lateral pairs instead of one at a time.



This image shows a lateral walk. You can see the left hooves are forward on the ground whilst the right legs are back.

Troubleshooting & Tips

With the halt transition:-

Some horses can be quite forward, meaning that they tend to be quite happy to go into faster paces. These horses can be difficult to slow down and keep at one pace. This is a common problem with ex-racehorses recently retired from their racing career. Horses which are difficult to slow down can also be quite strong in the hand, meaning that when a rein aid is applied they cross their jaw and block against the aid, they will in fact feel strong or heavy on the end of the rein.

For these horses the manner in which you slow them down or bring them to a halt can be altered slightly. Riding onto a small circle and spiralling it down so that the circle becomes smaller and smaller while applying the aids for halt can be effective in influencing the horse to slow down.

An exercise which can be effective in getting the horse more responsive to the aids for halt is to ask for a transition to halt every couple of steps. For example, walking the horse for five steps then halting and repeating the process, walk for five steps then halt. It is important to make sure the horse comes to a complete stop before asking for walk again. If the horse begins to anticipate the halt transition increase or decrease the number of steps in walk. The aim of this exercise is to encourage the horse to respond quicker and softer (less resistance) to the aids.



Extension Lesson

Sitting on a chair, practice increasing the weight on both seat bones.

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Is your horse 'on' or responsive to the aids or 'slow' or 'off the aid'?

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Watch another rider to see how their horse responds to the aids. Is their horse responsive or slow off the aids?

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Recommended Reading

Publication:-

The principles of riding

Fundamentals of riding

Author:-

German National Equestrian Federation

Charles Harris

References

Publication:-

The principles of riding

Author:-

German National Equestrian Federation

Images:-

Pages 5 -7 & Google images
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Page 8 www.thehorsemagazine.com/.../clemens_on_walk.htm

Page 9 www.yourhorse.co.uk/.../