

Online HorseCollege



Student Workbook

2.R.06 Riding a Horse in Trot

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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.

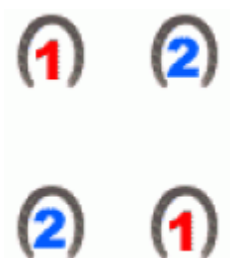
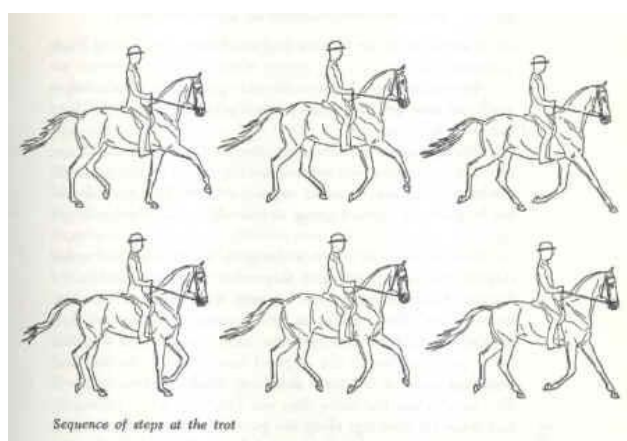
There are 4 'natural' gaits which are walk, trot, canter and gallop.

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

The Trot

The Trot

In the trot a horses' legs move in diagonal pairs producing a 2 beat gait with a moment of suspension, meaning, there is a small period of time as the horse moves its weight from one pair of legs to the other that there are no hooves on the ground. In dressage there are many variations within the trot involving lengthening or creating elevation in the stride.



Footfalls-

The sequence in which the legs move is left hind leg and right front leg move together then the right hind leg and left front leg move together



In this photo you can just see the brief moment of suspension

Riding Trot

Your seat should follow the horses' movement in walk, canter and sitting trot. In rising (also called posting) trot (when every second beat you rise up out of the saddle) you will need to time your rising so that you're up out of the saddle on the correct diagonal.

Diagonals

Trot diagonals are when you time your rising trot so that you're out of the saddle when a particular pair of legs move. Remember the trot has 2 beats and the legs move in diagonal pairs, so the right hind leg moves with the left front leg and the left hind leg moves with the right front leg.

To be on the 'correct diagonal' you should be out of the saddle when the outside front leg comes forward and places on the ground, which means you will be in the saddle as the outside front leg comes back under the horse to be lifted again.

So to clarify, if you're travelling on the right rein (travelling to the right) you will be rising when the left front leg comes forward. If you're travelling on the left rein (travelling to the left) you will be rising when the right front leg comes forward.

There are two reasons it is desirable to ride on the correct diagonal-

- 1) To work both the left and right muscle groups of the horse
- 2) By being on the correct diagonal you are positioned to be sitting in the saddle at the best time to give the horse a leg aid because that is the best phase of the horses' movement when the horse will be able to carry out what your leg aid has asked.

Should you find yourself on the incorrect diagonal i.e. you're sitting when the outside front leg is forwards, to change yourself onto the correct one you need to stay seated in the saddle for an extra beat (up, down, up, down, down) and then return to the normal rhythm of rising trot (up, down, up, down, up etc).



This rider is on the correct diagonal. You can see she is rising as the right shoulder/front leg is coming forward.
(See the video for more a visual explanation)

Riding Trot (cont.)

The second way of riding trot is sitting trot. This involves the rider remaining in contact with the saddle by sitting in the saddle every beat.

Every horse will have a different trot. A deep, supple seat is required for sitting to the trot and this can take some practice to develop. The seat of the rider is a combination of the pelvis, hips and thighs. To acquire a good seat the rider needs to be able to follow the movement of the horse with the pelvis.

Moving the pelvis requires the rider to constantly adjust the tension; that is the degree of tone of the different muscles of the trunk. This is often referred to as 'bracing the back'. As the riders skill develops the control of these muscles will become an unconscious effort.

Another way of describing this is that as the horses' back comes up the riders abdominal and muscles of the lower back contract which causes the pelvis to tilt forward then as the horses back moves down the riders back flattens and the pelvis is tilted into the small of the back.



(a.)

(a) Pelvis position as the horses' back comes up. The pelvis is tilted forward and the riders back is slightly concave.



(b.)

(b) Pelvis position as the horses' back moves down. The pelvis is upright and the back is flat.

A good sitting trot should look effortless and be comfortable for the horse and rider. It is important to remember that the more you try to sit still the more you will tend to bounce, this is because your body becomes tense, stiff and rigid which prevents you from moving your pelvis, with the motion of the horse (or as it is commonly put prevents you from 'absorbing the movement').

Sitting trot can be tiring not only for riders but also for young horses and those with undeveloped top-line muscles, so it is a good idea to combined short periods of sitting trot with rising trot when learning and refining your skills at sitting trot. Your hands should be still when you perform sitting trot correctly so this can be a good indication if you're absorbing the movement and following the trot correctly.

Aids for Trot from Walk

A horse can be moved into trot from walk and halt. The aids are the same for moving the horse into walk, only applied stronger.

- To perform a transition into trot from walk 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 trot but still maintain a soft contact with the mouth (i.e. no loop or excessive slack in the reins).

The rider should know whether they will ride the trot sitting or rising before they ask for the transition, this is because the better prepared you are the more you can concentrate on other things. If you intend to perform rising trot once the horse moves forward into trot it is a good idea to remain in sitting trot for a couple of beats to get the trot established then move into rising trot.

The same rules apply for moving the 'slow to respond' horse into trot as does for moving into walk.

- apply the aids stronger if the horse doesn't respond
- reinforce the natural aids with an artificial aid if stronger natural aids do not work
- be consistent with how you apply and reinforce the aids so the horses response will improve



Aids for Walk from Trot

These aids will be the same as those for moving the horse from walk to halt, the difference however is moving from rising trot to sitting trot before the walk transition.

- If in rising trot a rider can influence the horse to slow down by slowing the speed of which you are rising and by not rising quite as high out of the saddle. This may take some practice before the rider becomes affective.
- Whilst slowing the horse in rising trot the rider is also applying slight leg pressure and a measured amount of non-yielding rein.
- As the horse starts to slow the rider can move into sitting trot and the weight can be placed onto the seat bones by using stronger back muscles,
- All the while still using the slight forwards, pushing aid with the leg and non-yielding rein with the hand.
- A yielding rein should be employed immediately once the horse responds.

This is a good method for riders who are still developing a strong, supple seat in sitting trot. Riders who are confident and established in their sitting trot can perform the transition all the while whilst sitting in the saddle.



Troubleshooting & Tips

Rising Trot:-

Getting the correct rhythm for rising trot can be difficult especially if riding a particularly bouncy horse. The main problems that occur with rhythm when rising is when the rider is either going too fast or too slow for the beat of the trot.

The best situation for a rider to be able to focus on themselves is if they are lunged. This was the person on the ground lunging the horse controls the speed and direction and the rider doesn't have the distraction. However the requirement of this is a horse which is accustomed to and lunges well and a handler who is capable and experienced in lunging a horse and rider.

To assist you in finding the correct beat of the horse it can help to go into sitting trot for a couple of beats so you can feel how quickly (or slowly) the horse is trotting. You will be feeling for the 'bounces' in the trot. Each bounce in the trot will represent an 'up' or 'down' phase in the rising trot.

So if the horse is trotting fast i.e. bounce...bounce...bounce...bounce, then the up and down of the rising trot needs to be in that same rhythm i.e. up...down...up...down.

If the trot is slow i.e. bounce.....bounce.....bounce.....bounce, then again the up and down of your rising trot should be the same i.e. up.....down.....up.....down.

To help maintain your rhythm in the rising trot think or say the words 'one, two, one, two' or 'up, down, up, down' in time with the beat of the trot.

If the rider is rising up too high out of the saddle it will also affect the rhythm of the rising trot because by standing up too high the rider then has too far to come back into the saddle in one trot beat and so the rhythm is lost. Use the spring of the trot to help push you out of the saddle rather than standing up high in the stirrups.

'Double bouncing' can occur when the rider comes down heavily into the saddle and instead of briefly touching the saddle with the seat the rider sits down, bounces and rises again. This can be caused by rising too high, incorrect position with the lower leg too far forward and laziness.



Troubleshooting & Tips

Sitting trot:-

Some people may find sitting easier to accomplish than others. One of the biggest hurdles to overcome will be bouncing.

Bouncing can be caused by the rider being tense and stiff, gripping with the leg (in this case the horse will also get faster which in turn makes the bouncing worst), leaning too far forward and in the extremes leaning too far back. If you're bouncing in the sitting trot check the following:-

- Are your legs gripping or clamped onto the horses sides? It may be that your whole leg or just your knee is holding on. Gripping with the leg pulls your weight out of the saddle meaning that you are not sitting deep into the saddle which results in bouncing. To correct this relax your leg on the horses' sides, it's ok to have them in contact with the horses' belly but not clamped on. You should have weight in your stirrups (but not braced into the stirrups) with the heel the lowest point of your body.
- Are you leaning forward? A 'foetal' type position where the rider seems to curl into a ball on top of the horse- where the knee and heel is brought up, toes pointing down and shoulders over the knee also brings the weight out of the saddle is the extreme of this. A rider which leans forwards needs to bring the shoulders back over the hips, seat into the saddle and stretch the leg down and around the horse.
- Leaning too far back can be due to the rider pushing the lower leg forward and bracing themselves against the movement with the leg. Another way a rider might do this is that the shoulders have been moved to an exaggerated position behind the hips. Again to correct this, the rider must bring the shoulders over the hips. If the leg was pushed out towards the nose of the horse it needs to come back to rest around the girth area.

All of the above position alterations have occurred to compensate for the rider being stiff and rigid in the pelvis. The hips and pelvis region must move in sitting trot to be able to *follow* the movement of the horses' back. The more you try to sit still the more you will bounce. However this doesn't mean you go limp on top of the horses' back. If you're still in the beginning stages of learning sitting trot then you may find that your legs and hands wobble and are generally difficult to control in sitting trot and this should improve as your skills develop.

To get your pelvis region moving it may help to visualise and pretend you have ping pong balls attached to the side of each hip and they need to move up and down with the movement. Also make sure your shoulders stay back, this can be exaggerated slightly to help position your body into the deepest part of the saddle.



Troubleshooting & Tips

Sitting Trot (cont.):

Another common problem is loosing stirrups or the foot pushing too far into the stirrup. This usually stems from the rider gripping with the legs, drawing the weight out of the heel. There should be a consistent weight in the foot to maintain the stirrup in the correct position. But the weight should not be braced in the stirrup, bracing will be evident because the rider will push the leg forward towards the horses shoulders.

The riders' hands' moving not only makes it difficult to use the reins properly but it is not good for the horses' mouth. Some horses may find it confusing as the movement from the hands will bump the bit around in the horses' mouth. When starting to learn sitting trot it may be difficult for the rider to co-ordinate and concentrate on sitting to the trot and keeping the hands still along with everything else that goes with riding. Therefore it can be helpful for the rider to hold onto the pommel of the saddle. This is ok if you're being lunged but if not you may need to alternate hands and hold onto the saddle with one hand and use the other for guiding the horse. Another method of 'training' your hands to stay still is to attach a monkey grip to the saddle and whilst holding the reins, loop your little finger under the monkey strap. The reins and horses' mouth should not be used to by the rider to balance on.

As described before the hips and pelvis need to move in sitting trot. But the hips shouldn't swing from left to right. Excessive swinging with the hips can interfere with weight and seat aids given by the rider. If this is a problem, make sure you are sitting in the centre of the saddle with your weight distributed evenly. On curved lines ensure your body is positioned correctly for the direction you are travelling.



Troubleshooting & Tips

Walk to Trot Transition:-

Some problems you may encounter include-

- Forward horses that are quick to respond to the trot aid or that don't want to stop at trot.
- Lazy horses that are slow to respond to the trot aid or that don't want to trot.
- Co-ordinating the aids for trot and maintaining balance.
- Bouncing in the saddle as the horse goes into trot.

These problems may be somewhat similar to those encountered when performing a halt to walk transition. If the rein contact is too strong the horse may find your aids conflicting in that your legs and seat are saying 'go' but your hands are saying 'whoa'. The opposite to this is that if the forward driving aids are too strong and rein contact too little you won't have much control when the horse picks up trot or if the horse jumps forward from the aids into canter.

If you are just learning to move the horse from walk to trot (or trot to walk) then maintaining your balance is probably one of your top priorities. If you struggle with balance when moving the horse to and from trot it can be helpful to use one hand to hold onto the saddle while you use the other for guiding and control. If you can be lunged on a horse you will be able to use both hands to hold the saddle and then progress to one, then none.

Horses that are keen and happy to trot may only require a soft leg aid. It is important that when riding a horse which is happy to go forward that you keep a good rein contact and length, this way if the horse gives you more speed than you expected you will have immediate control.



The aids and methods of applying them for moving a lazy horse into trot will be the same process used for moving a lazy horse into halt and walk.

To help eliminate any bouncing as you move into trot, make sure that you haven't dropped your shoulders forward in anticipation of the trot or as you have used your leg aids.

Troubleshooting & Tips

Trot to Walk Transition:-

Some problems you may encounter include:-

- Forward horses that are difficult to return to the walk.
- Co-ordinating the aids for walk and maintaining balance (see previous page).
- Bouncing in the saddle as you sit to return to walk.

Exercises that were described in the previous workbook for bringing strong horses back to halt can be used to return them to walk. Riding onto a small circle and spiralling it down so that the circle becomes smaller and smaller while applying the aids for walk can be effective in influencing the horse to slow down. This should be done gradually as turning the horse sharply onto a tight circle could cause the horse injury. The reason small circles are effective in slowing the horse down is because:-

- a) it is much harder for the horse to maintain speed and energy on a small circle
- b) on a small circle the horse is more inclined to position the hind-legs on a slightly bigger circle than the front legs (a well educated horse and rider can keep the front and hind legs following the same track). By doing this it disengages the hind end which means the horse cannot use the hindquarters as efficiently to keep powering on in speed.

Frequent transitions from trot to walk and vice versa can be a useful exercise in getting a horse more responsive and obedient to the aids. For example, trotting the horse for five steps then walking and repeating the process, trot for five steps then walk. It is important to make sure the horse comes to a complete walk and has even, regular steps before asking for trot again. If the horse begins to anticipate the trot or walk transition increase or decrease the number of steps in walk or trot.

If you are having trouble with sitting trot as you return to walk try to slow the horse down a little more in trot before you sit for walk. Eventually you should be able to sit through the trot-walk transition no matter what speed the trot is at but to start with and make the process easier for you and your horse slow the horse down in the trot while rising then when it is at a suitable speed and before walk go into sitting trot.

Troubleshooting & Tips (cont.)

Horses which trot fast:-

Some breeds of horses will be more likely to trot very quickly than others. And some previous training can influence this also for example horses which have been trained to be racehorses or trotters will be quick. Sometimes young horses can be quick because their balance, both on their own and under a rider is still developing.

Some exercises which might help to slow these types of horses down and keep them travelling at a consistent speed are:-

- Figures and changes of rein. Riding different figures and frequent changes of rein will help to develop a horses' balance. This is because the rider will be using the aids frequently thus helping to balance the horse.
- Frequent transitions. Riding a downwards transition to walk or halt when a horse starts to get too fast is a good way of correcting the problem before it gets to a point where it is difficult to control the horse.
- Another method using transitions is when the speed increases to almost return the horse to walk, so the aids will be applied in the same manner for a walk transition and then when the horse slows and starts to respond, allowing it to remain in trot. A soft leg aid may be required to prevent the horse from actually going into walk.



Extension Lesson

If you have mastered the rising trot and trot diagonals see if you can determine, by 'feeling' which diagonal you're riding on without looking at the horses' shoulders. It may take some practice but it will help to develop your riding skills.

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What have been some problems you have encountered with riding a horse in trot?

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What could be some potential causes of these problems?

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Ask another rider if they have had a problem when riding a horse in trot.

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What was the cause of their problem and how did they overcome it?

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Recommended Reading

Publication:-

The principles of riding

Author:-

German National Equestrian Federation

Webpages:-

http://www.newrider.com/Kinder_Way/The_Paces/sitting_trot.html

References

Publication:-

The principles of riding

Author:-

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Images:-

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