

Going Through the Paces  
by Elizabeth Graves©



Pacer on Track ©Alan G Mattison

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Understanding a true pace is very easy, the difficulty comes in understanding all the possible phases before a true 2 beat pace.

Most are familiar with terms such as;

Pacey  
Swingy  
Lateral  
Broken pace  
Stepping pace

What do they all mean? I will try to clarify some of these for you. Sometimes the faster moving hoof can make these gaits difficult to identify to an untrained eye.

What is a True Pace

The gait of pace is a 2 beat gait, 1-2. It is lateral in PICKUP of the legs on the same side and lateral in the SET DOWN of the same two legs. The horse will shift from side to side, alternating lateral pairs forward and then back. At the very fast speeds of pace, such as those seen in harness

racing, one can see the four hooves clear of the ground in suspension as the horse jumps from lateral pairs. The slower the speeds of pace, the suspension disappears and the hooves may not set down exactly at the same time: with the hind setting down just before the fore on the same side but is still very hard to see. In a stepping pace it is very easy to see the hind set down before the same side fore. Other variations are a broken pace, but still closer to a 2 beats in set down than the broken pace of stepping pace.



The Other 2 Beat Gait

Liz and “Sunny Bright Eyes” executing the Trot

The trot is also a 2 beat gait, 1-2. The difference in the gait of trot is that the diagonal pairs are working together.

Right hind, left fore TOGETHER

Left hind, right fore TOGETHER

Again as in pace there is a shift of weight and suspension of all 4 hoofs clearing the ground but it is shifting between diagonal pairs instead of lateral pairs

Understanding Lateral

The term lateral can be used in two different elements for definitions of gait timing.

1. Lateral pick up Gaits of;

- \*Pace Broken paces, variations (including stepping pace)
- \* Corto
- \* Sobreandando
- \* Stepped rack

- \* Rack
- \* Tolt
- \* Largo

2. Lateral in set down Gaits of:

- \* Pace
- \* Flying pace of Icelandic horse

3. Gaits of lateral pick up with a broken 4 beat set down Gaits of:

- \* Stepping pace
- \* Corto
- \* Sobreandando
- \* Stepped rack
- \* Rack
- \* Tolt
- \* Largo
- \* Swingy or Pacey

It is the gaits that are closer in lateral set down (not pick up) than the stepping paces broken 4 beat set down, that brings forth the meaning of swingy or pacey in gait. These are gaits that are just broken out of 2 beats but not quite the very definable stepping pace where one can see the hind set down prior to the fore on the same side and hear the broken timing of 1-2--3-4.

Getting Pacey

**A horses can be or start getting pacey at any speed.** There are pacey walks, too pacey racks and so on. A horse can be genetically inclined to pace or trained toward pace. A horse can pace in a high head position or low head position, but both have either a very ventroflexed back to a slightly hollow back. Both types will move their back muscles from side to side:

- the up head and necked horse will be tighter in their movement
- the low head and necked horse will be loose in the back muscle movement

But both are still using one side of the back muscles and then the other when shifting to lateral pairs.

In the following pictures are examples of gaits going both lateral in set down and some not, to make comparisons.

Walk

The first picture is a clear picture of a walk the next 2 are the marked up versions of the walks.

Walk A

Walk B

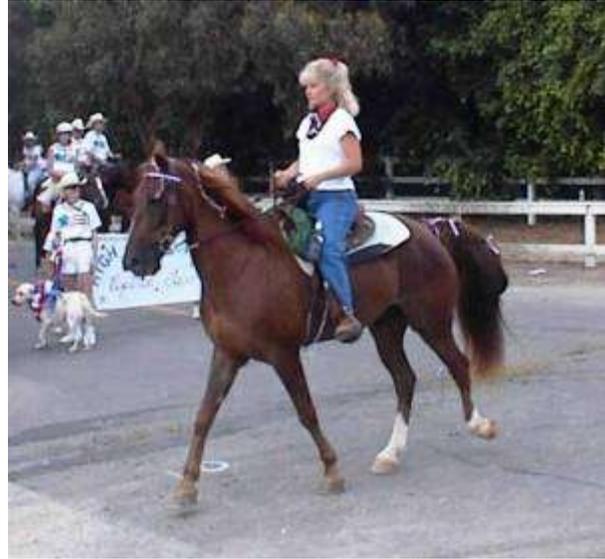


Amanda on "High hats Bubba"

Walk A



In photo A we can see that this is a true 4 beat walk. This horse is picking up each hoof at a separate time and setting down at a separate time. In this phase of the hoof fall sequence we see the left hind has set down before the left fore. The right fore leg is perpendicular at its full weight bearing phase and the right hind is still bearing weight with the hoof flat on the ground but will be picking up and moving forward before the right fore. The legs are moving independently of each other, not moving forward or



Walk B



In this photo we can see that the legs on the left side of the horse are working together going back. This is not a hard pace in that it is not 2 beats through a full gait phase. You can see that the right hind has just barely set down prior to the right fore but it is closer to a 2 beat pace than a 4 beat broken stepping pace in that the left hind is not just starting to lift off from the ground but has actually cleared the ground and is about to come forward. As the right fore touches the ground the left fore will be off the ground and back as

back together.

will the left hind is still off the ground. This will cause weight to be bearing on the right side of the horses briefly. As the left side legs are lifting off together and coming forward the left hind will touch down just barley before the left fore. This makes this gait a lateral or pacey walk.

Photo C & D are of horses in the gait of Speed Racking.



Photo C

In photo C we can see that the right front is still perpendicular to the ground and the left front has a nice lift and fold, so while this horse is moving very fast it is still able to maintain form and the even timing of the racking gait.



Photo D

In photo D, when looking at the right front we see it is not perpendicular to the ground but is angled back working closer in set down with the right hind. Notice this horse is not folding as much in the front. The lift is there but the fold is not. This is very common to see when a gait starts to get lateral in set down at faster speeds. This horse if brought down a notch in speed to maintain form would have a closer to even set down and more fold to the left front. This is still a rack but a pacey rack.

Notice the single hoof support on the right fronts on both horses the next hoof set down will be the left hind then giving the 2 hoof support of the gait. The gait of rack is lateral in pick up but a 4 beat in set down, 1-2-3-4 being an even set down. In a speed racking class it is matter of the judge at a specific show as to whether they will be one to place the fastest horses without breaking gait regardless of form or one the looks for correctness of form to be maintained first and speed without breaking second.

## The Tolt

The gait of Tolt is the same as the gait of rack when it is timed up evenly and the hoof support sequence is the same in that it is two hoof, one hoof. The gait of tolt can also get trotty or pacey changing the hoof fall timing from and even 4 beat set down of 1-2-3-4 to 1-2--3-4 when pacey and 1--2-3--4 when trotty. It is a gait of lateral pick up.

Photo E



Photo E shows a horse in a faster tolt and still maintaining form with the lateral pick up on the right side and the right hind is about to set down flat starting a 2 hoof support. The horse is showing a nice lift and fold in the right front and the left front is perpendicular to the ground not going lateral.

Photo F



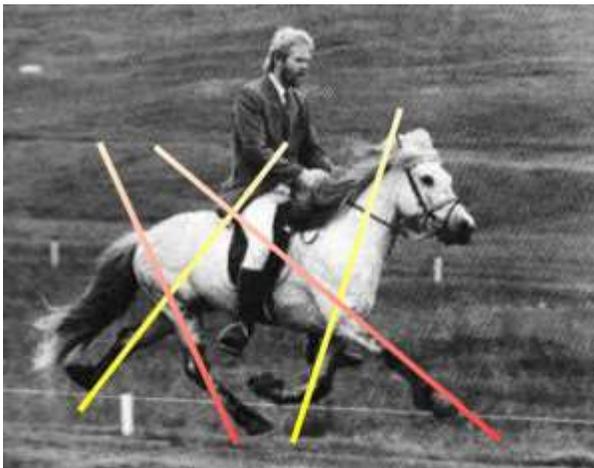
Photo F is also at some speed but this horse shows each side working closer together in pick up and set down. This horse is also at the single hoof support in this photo but one can see the left fore is angle back working closer with the left hind than working separately in set down. This will cause a longer space of time between the hoof set down between the right fore and left hind. Notice also that this horse has lost some of the fold to the right front and again just a bit slower in speed would cause this horse set down more evenly between hoof falls and maintain form. This is a tolt going to the pacey side but one can see this gait go even pacier than shown in photo F and still not be the flying pace known to this breed.

## Stepping Pace

In this photo we see the gait of a stepping pace. The left legs have lifted up and forward together but the left hind has set down before the left fore will. The legs on the right side are working back together. If the right hind was not with the toe touching but flat on the ground it would be a running walk but a more lateral one. Also if this was to happen with the right hind the right fore would not be angled going back as far as it is in this photo. This is the 2 hoof support of the gait and when the left fore sets down it will be a 3 hoof support of the gait. Now to see where this gait could change to another from a stepping pace is if the right hind was off the ground completely this would be a stepped rack (a 2 hoof, 3 hoof support) but a pacey one. If this horse was pushed up for more speed with more engagement of the hindquarters there may be more lift and fold to the fronts for the gait of a stepped rack and it may also help this horse move away from lateral in set down and bring the right fore leg more under the shoulder rather than angled back. When a horse tends to have a lower longer reach at a slower speed when going to a lateral set down in gait, it is easier to see a gait getting pacey because the hooves are working closer to the ground on the same side. This horse is getting very close to a 2 beat pace but not quite there.



### Flying Pace



Our last photo is of the flying pace of the of the Icelandic horse. It is very easy to see the 2 sides each working together forward and back making for a 2 beat gait. Lateral in pick up and also lateral in set down with a moment of suspension off the ground with all four hooves as the horse shifts from one side to the other. This is a very smooth pace to ride and is one of great speed.

So in closing, it is very easy to see a true pace but it is understanding the difference between a lateral lift off of gait and when a gait is getting lateral (pacey) in its set down. In this article I have used pictures to compare each other with. I have also tried to ease you into using some new skills when analyzing gait. In my explanations I have added what is about to happen maybe with a next hoof fall or what could be if a leg or hoof were in a different position to create a different gait, or more correct form of a gait. Part of developing a good eye is seeing what is going to come next to help keep up with what you are seeing in a gait, to develop that fast use of the eye. Also how a different leg or hoof position could change a gait, which will help one to have a better understanding of what it may take to get a horse to where we want it for a specific gait.

All this takes time, patience and brain work of an individual person to develop, but in order to really understand the gaits it must be done. One owes it to themselves and their horses if we really want to be able to understand and develop the true desired gaits in our horses. Learning this will take you next to learning the how's and why's, in which a horse uses its self to create any physical movement desired or undesired.