

Within a Fox Trot

by [Liz Graves](#)

The fox trot seems to be an easy gait for people to identify. Understanding what the elements are that make up this unique gait tends to be difficult for people to explain or verbalize.

The last 25 years has seen changes and variations of the fox trot that has added a new confusion. The gait of fox trot is to be smooth and comfortable to the rider, efficient and without stress to the well conditioned horse. When evaluating the new age fox trot "show gait"; the riders are often seen bouncing in the saddle taking more concussion to the body while the horse is moving unbalanced. The efficient relaxed, easy elements of the fox trot are being replaced by the desire for speed and more of the animation elements of the gait such as:

- head nod
- reach
- tail bob
- ears flopping
- stride

The most important elements of the gait are being sacrificed. This being the **correct** support sequence of the hooves while in gait. *This support sequence is what makes the timing of the gait correct and the smooth ride possible.* In maintaining this support we are asking a horse to perform as it is structurally capable without undue stress or sacrificing future soundness of a horse.

TIMING

A true fox trot is a 4 beat gait with a bit longer hold between beat 2 & 3. 1-2--3-4. It is an uneven 4 beat gait in that the diagonal hooves hit the ground closer together with the fore hitting just a bit before the diagonal hind. In the *new age gait* the timing can be very close to 2 beats of the trot which the diagonals pick up and set down even closer together.

HOOF FALL SEQUENCE

The start of any cycle for determining sequence is when the right hind lands on the ground. In the fox trot it is right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore. Remember ***this hoof fall sequence does not make this a lateral gait as the hooves are picking up and setting down at separate times.*** This is **just** the sequence not the **timing**. ***The definition of timing is the amount of time that has lapsed between hoof falls.*** **The reason that the foxtrot has been defined as a broken diagonal gait is that people seeing the broken diagonal set down.**

WEIGHT BEARING SEQUENCE

- A, 3 hooves (2 hind, 1 fore)
- B, 2 hooves (diagonals)

- C. 3 hooves (2 fore, 1 hind)
- D. 2 hooves (lateral)

The importance of *the weight bearing sequence above is that it maintains the weight shifts* for balance of the horse. This reduces concussion from the hooves through the body of the horse, creating a smooth fox trotting gait.

When adding excessive reach and stride to obtain speed, the weight bearing sequence is changed. This reduces the number of support phases causing the hinds and fore's to support more weight independently (transverse pairs) by not staying on the ground as long together. This can also be pushed to the speed where transverse fore's are at a point in which neither is in contact with the ground, making for a short suspended period with the fore's in the gait. Giving the gait the look of a running type fox trot.

SUPPORT SEQUENCE

One cycle of a support sequence starts when the right hind is on the ground and finishes when the right hind comes off the ground.

In the animation below I have drawn a very slow fox trot, just out of a flat walk. I chose the slowest to show all the 9 possible support phases in this gait. These 9 support phases gives maximum support , balance and least concussion to the horse , just not the faster speed , added reach and length of stride. A faster fox trot can still be smooth until pushed to a point that the weight bearing hooves are changed. The closer one pushes a horse toward a 2 beat diagonal the rougher the gait becomes and in some cases actually rougher than a 2 beat trot.

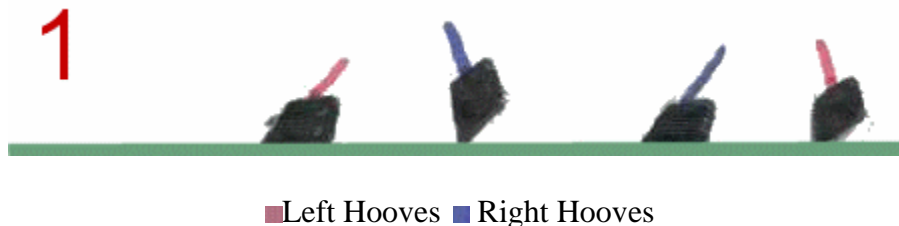


Photo #1



I have placed this horse first in order because it is the closest to the slow fox trot depicted above. In this photo the weight bearing hooves are 2 fore, 1 hind. This horse is showing all the ease and balance of the fox trot and doing it at liberty as well. It may not have speed but it is *correct for maximum support, balance and smoothness, while being very easy on the horse.*

Photo # 2



In this photo here the horse again showing 2 fores, 1 hind weight bearing hooves. *This horse is moving at more speed but the balance and support have not been compromised.* Notice the added extension between the fores. This horse is showing the same ease in execution of the gait as the horse in photo #1. I also want to point out in this photo the light amount of contact this rider has from hands to bit. The horse has been taught to carry itself and the weight of the rider without an over amount of pushing with the rider's legs and holding with the rider's hands to maintain frame of correct gait. This rider is sitting balanced and comfortable.

Photo # 3

In this photo we see a horse that is being pushed for more



This was originally a photo the owner sent in to have the horse participate in the Gait Analysis. After the article came out, they requested the photo be removed. We have done so.

speed of gait which is commonly seen in today's show fox trotter. Notice the *increased distance between the fore's and the increased hock action in the right hind.* This hock action will transfer more movement to the rider's seat. It still can be a somewhat smooth gait. In this photo

- the right hind is about to set down
- the left fore is not yet set down
- The right fore is about to lift off the ground.
- There is going to be a point where both fore's are going to be off the ground together briefly and all the weight is going to be carried on both hinds.

This type of fox trot also reduces the number of phases in a support cycle causing the legs to take on more concussion.

This animal may not always move in this manner but is just pushing more in this photo.


Photo # 4



In this photo we can clearly see the *2 pairs of diagonals working together.*

Notice the right hind, left fore reaching forward together, then the left hind, right fore extended back together.

In this phase of the photo it is very hard to decipher if the



left fore has touched down before the right hind giving the image of a 2 beat gait towards trot. If the left fore truly has set down before the right hind it is so fast it is very hard for the eye to see.

In closing there are several variations of fox trots being executed that can now be seen within the fox trotter breed. With the examples shown above one can get a better understanding of what these variations can be and in some cases you will have to be very quick of eye to see the differences. Looking at a rider and how little or how much movement they are making in the saddle. This can give you a good idea to look for a specific variation in the gait of fox trot.