

What Gait are these foals performing?



Gaits are defined by their footfall sequence, support sequence, and the timing of the pickup and set down of the hooves. The symmetrical gaits of gaited horses all generally follow the same footfall sequence, starting with the set down of the right hind hoof. The sequence is: right hind, right front, left hind, left front. At slower speeds, these gaits also share a support sequence. Two hind, one front; one hind, one front (diagonal); two front, one hind; one hind one front, (lateral). What separates these gaits from one another is the timing of the pick up and set down of the hooves.

This is determined by the identification of the "dominant set" of legs (that is, the legs that move forward together) or in the case of the square, true walk, the lack of a dominant set. To tell what gait a horse is doing from a still shot, it is important to look at which legs appear to be moving forward together. Generally the motion can be determined by looking at the angles of the lower leg bones in relation to each other and the ground.



1. This foal has been "caught" in an interesting phase of his gait -- his support base is lateral (both left hooves in contact with the ground) but is about to become "tri pod" with both hind and one fore supporting.

None of his legs appears to be moving forward close in time with any other, although the lateral pairs are slightly closer in lift-off than the diagonal pairs. (the blue lines denote the general motion of each leg in the gait.)

His gait appears to be an even, four beat with slight lateral pairing in lift off. It could be either a slightly lateral walk/running walk or a corto from this picture. His length of stride suggests a walk rather than the tighter motion of the corto.



2. This foal has been captured at a diagonal support phase in her gait, about to become "tri pod" with both front and one hind supporting.

Unlike the colt in the previous picture, however, this filly does appear to be moving lateral legs forward closer in time than diagonal ones. (Again, the blue lines show the general motion of each leg.) Her gait, while definitely a broken 4 beat, is most likely a stepping pace or a pacey (lateral) walk.

By Lee Ziegler