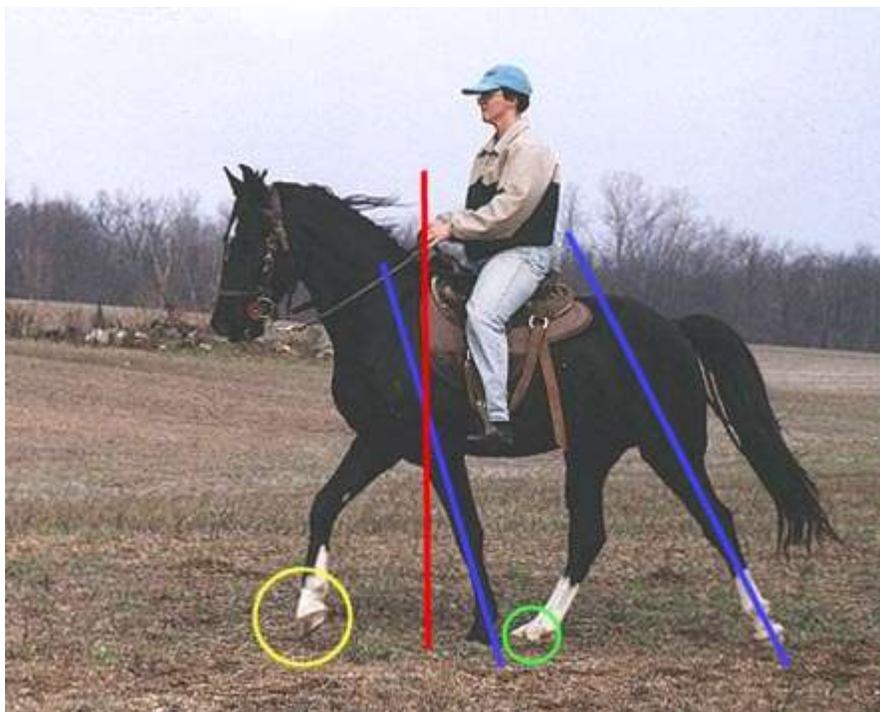


By Elizabeth Graves © 2001

What Gait is this horse performing?



The Gait of Stepping Pace

In the photo take notice that the ■ left fore and ■ left hind are both angled back (working together as a lateral pair) and when they start the phase of coming off the ground and forward it will be together. The ■ right fore and ■ right hind have picked up and moved forward together but the right hind has set down before the right fore making this the stepping pace instead of a 2 beat pace.

If the left fore was farther forward and ■ perpendicular to the ground this horse would be doing a running walk.

(It would be toward the lateral side of the running walk due to the right fore being so far forward in its reach but it would still be a running walk.) I see in the photo that this horse could very easily be taken to the gait of running walk. This is the kind of horse that when it comes in to me for training, I can get set into a running walk in no time!

In this photo we see a 4 beat gait that is very common. The Stepping Pace is seen often in the showing being used in place of a true running walk that is specifically called for as the correct gait. It is very normal to see it misinterpreted by many as a running walk. This is more frequent now than ever due to the trainers producing a pronounced head nod which is not a body based head shake of the running walk.

The Stepping Pace being executed in this photo is a very nice example of the gait. This horse is doing it beautifully and looks so easy and rather relaxed with lots of overstride in the hinds. The stepping pace can be a very smooth gait. I suspect on this horse it is very smooth as this horse is not being held up overly high in ventroflexion of the back and there is some element of a relaxed flow to this horse's gait.

The stepping pace is a 4 beat gait but is not evenly timed between the 4 beats. The timing is 1-2--3-4 with a longer pause between 2&3. It is not even, in that the set down of the lateral hooves (right hind, right fore) is shorter than the set down of the diagonal hoofs (right fore, left hind).

The hoof fall sequence is right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore but this does not what make the gait lateral. The stepping pace IS a lateral gait but it is made lateral in the pickup of the hooves. The right hind and right fore leave the ground together making it lateral. The hind sets down before the right fore which creates the uneven four beat gait or broken pace rather than the 2 beats of a pace.

In the stepping pace a rider can feel (even minimally) a slight side to side motion in the hips, this is due to the lateral pick up of the hooves and legs on the same side. Also even if a head nod is present, one can see slight to quite a bit of side to side motion in the head and neck. One may have to look at a horse coming straight on to see this or also looking at the poll of the horses head as it goes by, this can be seen. From a horses back (not on the ground) a rider should be able to see the side to side motion showing in the lower part of the head in front of you. It may be ever so slight and just be seen briefly from side to side in the muzzle area from the horses back.

Added notes:

I would also like to comment on the rider in this picture. I was first taken by the overall appearance of this horse and rider team. The rider is in wonderful form, the equitation is lovely. She is sitting balanced, not interfering with the ability of the horse to carry itself and the rider. The rider looks soft and relaxed but ready to be effective in any support signals the horse may need. The horse looks so content and forward in what it is doing. This is the look of a well matched team; the horse is a fabulous animal. I really like the way it's structured and looking through the bridle.

Some final comments:

The stepping pace is a smooth gait and for many horses out there this is going to be their smoothest gait. There are many that are doing this gait instead of the running walk that may be possible in an individual. It is a matter of personal preference in what a rider wants and is happy with in a gait. It is up to each of us to know the difference between these gaits to better understand our horses, what they are doing and teach others as to what they are seeing in a horse correctly.