

What Gait is It?

By Elizabeth Graves

Concept and photos by Judy Ryder Duffy

It is my hope that the first installment of "What Gait is It?" (Summer 2005) gave you some tools to use in learning to see gaits.

I was quite taken by these photos. It is not the gait that caught my attention first, but a lot more that appealed to me, possibly from my years as a judge in the show arenas. What stands out so clear to me is that this horse and rider looks like a team, working together with ease and seeming so comfort-

able together.

Note the content, relaxed look of the horse, going with a softly draped rein, self carrying in gait with just enough pelvis and leg support from his rider to keep him engaged in gait. The rider's hands are soft, yet in position to give the slightest whisper through rein to bit if the horse needs help in maintaining gait.

The gait we are working with in these photos may not be the smoothest

of the easy gaits on some horses, but is one that, done properly, is rather easy on the horse. It allows for a neutral to slightly dorsiflexed (rounded) back. This gait is one in which a horse can cover a rather long distance with minimal stress to the body (having first completed a good pre-conditioning program). Well-conditioned horses can hold this gait for ten-minute intervals, three times in an hour, walking in between, which makes it a very effi-



Photo # 1

Right Hind has lifted off the ground and has started its movement up and forward.

Right Fore is just lifting off the ground at the heel, soon to start its forward moment.

Left Hind is in full weight bearing support phase, downward slightly behind the rump of the horse.

Left Fore is in a full downward weight bearing position in a slightly forward position.

The full weight downward position of the left legs in this photo creates a 2-hoof, lateral support phase sequence.

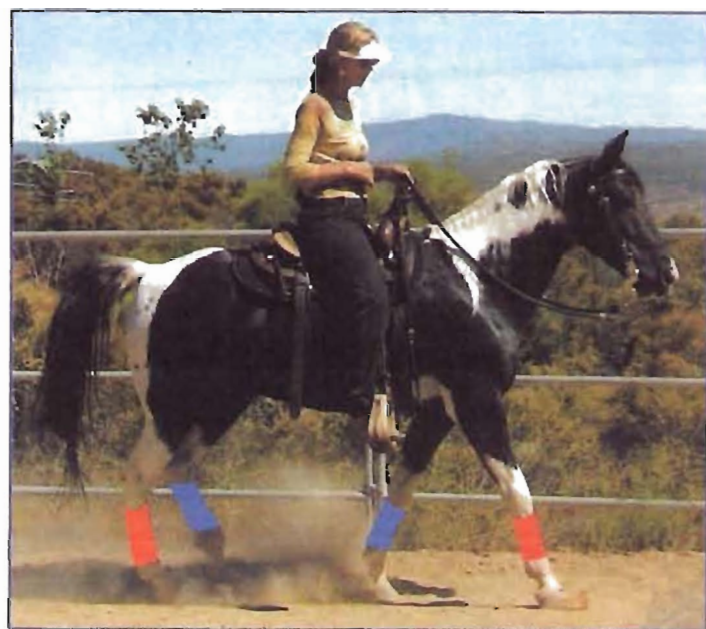


Photo # 2

Right Hind is in full downward weight position being under the hindquarter.

Right Fore is just started in full weight downward position with the leg being slightly forward.

Left Hind has lifted off the ground starting its forward advancement.

Left Fore is in full weight position, somewhat back, as it is just going to start to lift off at the heel.

In this photo the horse is in a 3-hoof support phase sequence - two fores and one hind.

cient gait. It averages between six and ten miles per hour.

Let's break up the mechanics of the gait. The footfall sequence is right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore, with an alternating 2-hoof, 3-hoof support sequence (two hooves on the ground, then three, then two again...) This is a gait with a broken four beat timing of 1-2- -3-4.

In noting how the legs are working, first look to see if are they working separately, or as (or nearly as) lateral pairs (legs on the same side working together). If neither, then look to the diagonal pairs of legs (right front/left hind, left front/right hind) and note if they are working together. Here the legs are working more in diagonal pairs, lifting off and moving forward together with the fore hoof hitting before the opposite hind hoof.

Now let's consider other elements

in this gait. Are the head or neck moving? In these photos there is a slight up and down head nod with some - but very minimal - neck motion. There is also an up and down motion of the croup and tail head. This horse looks to be very smooth in its gait. A clue to this is the minimal forward and backward shift of the rider's pelvis as the photos progress from #1 through #4.

In this gait the set down of the hind feet can range from capping (stepping directly over) the front hoof print to having some overstep (setting down ahead of the front hoof print) in some horses. A moderate head position is common with a low, long reach of the front legs. A high head set and high lifting of the front legs is not desirable of this gait. Often, because the hind cannon bones are longer in many horses, the measurement from

hock to ground is longer than desired in some other gaits, making the hock action of this gait more evident.

What gait is it?

Turn to page 64 for the answer.

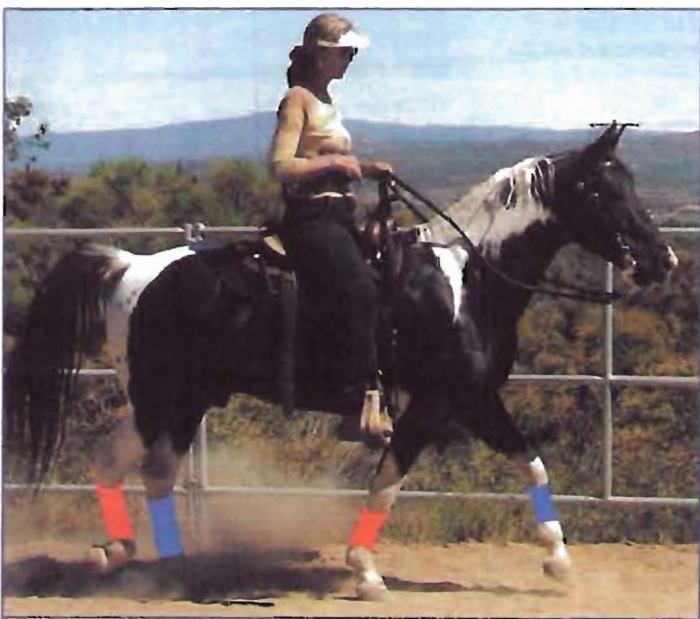
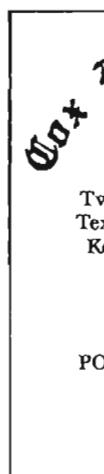


Photo # 3

Right Hind has lifted off the ground and is starting its forward advancement.

Right Fore is in full downward weight bearing position, just getting ready to lift off at the heel.

Left Hind is in full downward weight bearing position.

Left Fore is off the ground in a forward and downward position.

In this photo the horse is in a 2-hoof, diagonal support phase sequence.

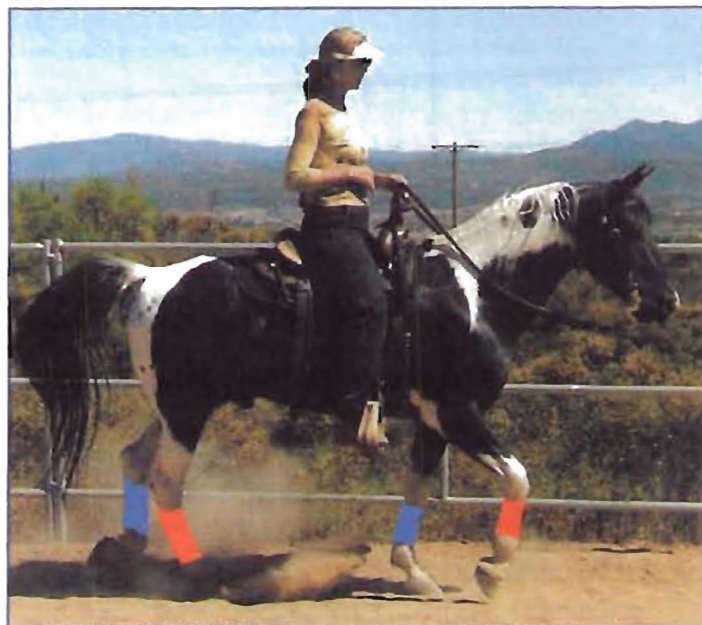


Photo # 4

Right Hind is in a full forward downward weight position. **Right Fore** has lifted off the ground and is starting its advancement forward.

Left Hind has lifted off the ground and has started its forward advancement.

Left Fore is in full downward weight position slightly angled back.

This photo is not in exact sequence with the first three. The instant before this he would have had two foresh and one hind making full weight support.

This photo shows a 2-hoof diagonal support phase sequence.

Continued from page 53.

What Gait Is It?

Answer: The fox trot

This gait can be performed by many horses in all the gaited breeds and is the signature gait of the Missouri Fox Trotter. It is performed here by the lovely Missouri Fox Trotter stallion, MAGIC'S CUSTOM DESIGN owned and ridden by Hope Adams.

When performed by the Paso Fino it is termed Trocha, and by the Peruvian Paso, the Pasitrote.