

What Gait Is It?

By Elizabeth Graves
Photos Judy Ryder

This series has been a means of teaching, in small pieces, how to identify gaits in photos. In a short amount of time it is easy for us to recognize those single photos we term as “signature gait shapes”; those which are the easiest and most commonly seen to depict a specific gait. These are that single form, or shape of a horse, which identify a running walk, fox trot, saddle rack, etc. The images are commonly seen used in Association logos, ranch logos, art work and so on. But this single captured shape of a support phase we get so familiar with is only one in many rotating support phases, which make up a full cycle of gait execution.

We have nine photos and #1, #5 and #9 are the ones we most often see as this gait's signature shape. But there are many more support phase shapes a horse will rotate through to complete a full gait cycle. The gait is harder for folks to identify when in these other support phases as their images haven't become so ingrained and familiar, but **each phase of the gait is as correct, and important, as those more readily recognized.**

Photos showing less familiar images of a gait sequence are sometimes mistaken for another gait, as sequences of different gaits can look similar to each other. In learning how to see a gait in one of these less familiar photos, we need to learn to be able to see where the hooves are coming from, where are they are now and where are they going. In learning this, with practice we will be able identify the gaits in these less familiar - more difficult - photos.

The Clues

This issue's gait is one we have not used before, but a rather popular gait.

- ◆ It is an **even four-beat gait** (1-2-3-4).
- ◆ The **legs do not work** in diagonal or lateral pairs, but **independently of each other** in pick up and set down, in this gait's purest form.
- ◆ The “**footfall sequence**” is lateral: right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore.
**Remember footfall sequence does not relate to gait timing, so it doesn't make it a lateral gait in where the legs are working together or closely together in pick-up or set-down of hooves.*
- ◆ This is a gait in which a **horse carries it's back in a neutral position**, being level, not hollow, nor rounded.
- ◆ There is a **vertical headshake**. Some horses have less a vertical head nod, in which the whole neck is involved, not a head flip with a breaking at the poll only (commonly caused by mechanical means).
- ◆ There is **overstride** of the hind hooves, meaning the hind hoof track will set down in front of the fore hoof track on the same side. A normal range of overstride commonly be from six inches up to 18 inches on some horses. More is not better, but individual horses execute what is possible within their conformation.
- ◆ High head carriage and height of front legs is not an element of the gait, but can be part of what a horse has in its structure. A higher headset is not better than a lower one; it just is what it is with in an individual horse.
- ◆ This is a gait that has an **element of looseness**, a relaxation which can be seen in the head and neck motion, the ease in which the front and hind legs reach forward for advancement.
- ◆ Some horses, when they get loose and have the rhythm of this gait, will **flop one ear or both ears**, let their **lips get loose** with a soft flopping effect, or some may work the rhythm through a clicking of the bit. These elements are not required, but just what some horses will exhibit.
- ◆ There is **little breaking and lifting of the hocks** for hind leg advancement. The hind hooves come just high enough off the ground to clear without the toes catching, making this one of the energy-saving factors of this gait's execution and efficiency.
- ◆ Many **horses lean into the gait**, looking much like they are pulling a plow.
- ◆ It is also common to see the “**waterfall tail**,” in which the horse lifts the tail without excess tension and a soft gentle wave flows through the hair from top to bottom.

With this issue we have made the one-year mark in this series of articles. I urge those that have been following it and those just starting to go back to the first issue and review the tips and basic guidelines for learning to identify gaits that we have been sharing with you along the way.

What Gait Is It?

1



Krystal is now in a **3-hoof support phase**: two hinds, with left hind forward, and the right fore. Left fore is in aerial phase.

2



This is a **diagonal support phase** with the left hind and right fore being in full support and right hind and left fore still in aerial phase.

5



This is again a **3-hoof support phase**, again being the hinds and one fore, but in this photo the right hind is in forward position and the left fore hoof is in support. The right fore is in aerial phase.

6



This is another **diagonal support phase**, but different than photo #2 in that it is now the right hind and left fore are in support and the left hind and right fore are in aerial phase.

Meet the Horse and Rider

Featured in this issue is HSM'S CHAMPAGNE KRYSTAL, owned by Julie Weinstock.

I had the pleasure of meeting up with Julie and Krystal a few months ago at their home in Lake Elsinore, CA.

Krystal was born in Sherwood, Oregon; and had some training in Tennessee, and some in California with Wendy Shaw, where Julie bought her on October 4, 2004.

Julie says, "She has the most amazing smooth gait I have ever felt and the gentle and loving attitude that's expected of a Tennessee Walker. Krystal loves kisses, especially when I kiss and whisper into her ears."

Judy Ryder, photographer, <http://icchorses.net>

3



Once again a **3-hoof support phase**, but different than photo #1 in that this is the two fore hooves and the right hind hoof. The right hind being in aerial phase.

4



Krystal is now in a **lateral support phase**, being the right fore and right hind hoof in support. The left fore and hind being in aerial phase.

7



The hooves are now in a **3-hoof support phase**, again of two fores and one hind, but this one is different than #3 in that the right hind is in support, and the left hind is in aerial support phase.

8



This is a **lateral support phase**, but different than #4 in that the left hind and left fore are in support. The right hind and fore are in aerial phase.

9



In this photo we are back to the same **3-hoof support phase** as photo #1 with two hinds in support: the left hind forward and the right fore in support, with the left fore being in aerial phase.

To learn more about gaits and to order Liz's DVDs on gait, gait structure, biting and more, see her ad, page 55, or visit her website at www.LizGraves.com

For the answer to 'What Gait Is It?' see page 72.

Answer to 'What Gait Is It?' page 58:

This is the gait of **running walk**, executed beautifully by a registered Tennessee Walking Horse.