

# What Gait Is It?

By Elizabeth Graves

Photos courtesy Judy Ryder Duffy

*In this issue's "What Gait Is It?" I'm going to ask you all to take up your reins and hang on because we are going to present you with a bit more of a challenge.*

We have two sets of four photos this time for you to analyze. These are two different gaits, but are termed as belonging to the same "family" of gaits. Both of these gaits are what are called lateral gaits, but are lateral in that the legs on the same side are working together or closely together in the pick-up phase (lifting of legs), but should not be working together or closely together in the set-down phase. When the legs are coming down they should be working independently of each other and the timing of both gaits is an even 1-2-3-4 beat. (You can hear an even rhythm as the hooves set down.)

## Ready, Set, Clues!

HERE ARE SOME CLUES AS TO WHAT THESE RELATED GAITS ARE...

- ◆ One gait has an alternating 2-hoof, 3-hoof support phase always and speed can range easily from eight to 24 miles per hour.
- ◆ The other gait most often has an alternating 1-hoof, 2-hoof support phase sequence, but for some horses it always speed can be an alternating 2-hoof, 3-hoof support phase sequence. This gait can range in speed easily from 12 miles per hour to more than 27 miles per hour for some horses.



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

**Left hind** is in full weight support.

**Left fore** is half-way through its forward advancement.

**Right hind** is lifting up just about to start its forward advancement.

**Right fore** is in full weight support.



In this photo the horse is now in a 3-hoof support phase sequence using two hind hooves and one fore hoof. **Left hind** is in full support but just about to lift off for forward advancement.

**Left fore** is in full weight support.

**Right hind** has just set down in full weight support.

**Right fore** is half-way through its forward advancement.

## Meet the Horses and Riders

by Judy Ryder Duffy

As always we thank the good sports who model the gaits.

Pages 54-55: Hope Adams, Trainer, of Southern California, on *Double A*, a registered National Spotted Saddle Horse gelding. (See <http://jeeryder.net/doubleA/>)

Pages 56-57: Joe Galarza, Trainer/Owner of Farms of Ta-Dae (Visit [www.farmsoftadae.com/](http://www.farmsoftadae.com/)) on his black Tennessee Walking Horse mare.

Both of the gaits shown take considerable energy to achieve. Due to the more contained frame (or body shape/carriage) a horse must maintain *with* that energy use, each is for covering short distances of ground. Gaited horse temperaments are well known to be “givers” and as such our horses will often go beyond what we ask. **With these two gaits we need to be aware of the responsibility in asking for them and not ask beyond what is within a horse’s physical limits.**

Each of these gaits involves varying amounts of ventroflexion or inversion (terms that mean to hollow out or lower the back). Due to energy required and the essential tightening and inversion of the body to perform these gaits, a horse will need a good conditioning program with lots of round-backed, collected walking to keep the body comfortable and sound to do them for many years without overstress or possible physical problems.

Some other elements of these two gaits:

- ◆ No head motion side to side. The head will either be still or can have a slight amount of nod.
- ◆ There often is an up and down bobbing of the tail head also due to the hock action and up and down motion of the hind legs.
- ◆ The feel of these gaits is one of smoothness, there will be no side-to-side motion of the body. A person can feel a very slight vibration in the tailbone, but it is soft and comfortable. A rider’s body will be still and not leave the saddle.



In this photo the horse is in a 2-hoof lateral support phase sequence.  
**Left hind** is just off the ground, but about to make ground contact.  
**Left fore** has just come off the ground and is starting its forward advancement  
**Right hind** is in full weight support.  
**Right fore** is in full weight support.



In this photo the horse is in a 2-hoof support phase sequence (which immediately follows the 3-hoof phase of two fores and the left hind on the ground).  
**Left hind** has lifted off the ground and is just starting its forward motion.  
**Left fore** is in full weight support.  
**Right hind** is in full weight support.  
**Right fore** is just past the halfway point of forward advancement and about to start downward.

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◆ When the legs are under the rider, one may also feel soft vibrations of the foot in the stirrup if their foot is sitting softly in the stirrup. If a rider is riding with the legs forward, one can feel a vibration in the ankles.

### Observations

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT EACH HORSE MAY NEED A BIT OF DIFFERENT SUPPORT TO ACHIEVE GAIT.

Our spotted horse, due to its structure tells me it will tend to be a diagonal (trotty) type horse and needs more lowering of the root of the neck to find the right body shape and physical elements to achieve the gait it is doing here. This is done by lifting the head, not by holding it in and/or tight.

Our black horse, due to its structure, indicates it is built more to be lateral, so the root of the neck needs to be raised some by lowering the head just a bit to avoid a stepping pace or even a true pace.

Every horse is a little different. Until you learn to see a horse's physical elements that support it in gait, you will need to experiment with raising or lowering the root of the neck. (See illustration.)

In both sets of photos the saddles on both horses are going into a down hill orientation, tipping downward toward the shoulders. This certainly will limit the maximum use of the shoulders and can interfere with a horse achieving its total amount of animation (lift and fold) of the front legs.

The use of back rigging or a pack cinch on a properly fitting saddle - making the cinching equally snug from and back - will level the saddle allowing the horse to achieve full use of it's front quarters.

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



In this photo the horse is in a 2-hoof lateral support hoof phase being left hind left fore.

**Left hind** is in full weight support.

**Left fore** is in full weight support.

**Right hind** is just about to finish its forward advancement and about to set down.

**Right fore** is halfway through its forward advancement.



In this photo the horse is in a 1-hoof support phase with the right fore hoof.

**Left hind** is about to finish its forward advancement and set down.

**Left fore** is halfway through its forward advancement.

**Right hind** has just lifted off the ground and about to start forward.

**Right fore** is in full weight support.



In this photo the horse is in a 2-hoof diagonal support phase with the right hind and left fore.  
**Left hind** has just lifted off the ground and about to start its forward advancement.  
**Left fore** is in full weight support.  
**Right hind** is in full weight support.  
**Right fore** is in the downward phase of forward advancement.



In this photo the horse is again in a 1-hoof support phase with the left hind.  
**Left hind** is in full weight support.  
**Left fore** is off the ground, but just about to make contact finishing its forward advancement.  
**Right hind** has lifted off the ground and is advancing forward.  
**Right fore** has just lifted off the ground and just starting its forward advancement.

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When observing horses for gait, be aware that if the legs are coming down laterally together, you most often will be witnessing a stepping pace rather than either of these gaits in true form. If you witness a horse getting diagonal in set down, then it's possible you are seeing a fox-rack or fox-trot rather than the true form of either of these two gaits.

Spotted horse is doing a saddle rack

Black horse is doing a true rack