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Photos provided by Judy
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*I hope many of you will be
as excited about this new
article series as I am.*

*The goal is to help give some
visual tools needed to identify
the various gaits possible
within our gaited breeds.*

Identifying Gait in Photos

WORKING WITH STILL PICTURES IS A nice way to begin identifying what a horse's legs, hooves and body are doing, and a bit easier than working with a moving animal in the early stages of learning. Having several photos in order makes it clearer in many cases than working with just one photo. Depending on the frame, the gaits can look very similar in just one photo, while having several of the same horse in order helps make the gait distinction much clearer.

I always encourage folks to watch the legs first and other varying factors, such as head movement, later. How the legs and hooves move will always tell what is real, while some other factors can be manifest through training and sometimes fool a person as to what gait is truly being executed by a horse. It will take time and watching many horses to develop the eye for identifying gait.

Start with Hooves and Legs

1. Look at two legs on the side nearest you.

- ◆ Do they appear to move at exactly the same time?
- ◆ Do they appear to move forward at approximately but not exactly the same time?
- ◆ Do they appear to move forward separately, not together?

2. Look at the hind leg on the side nearest you and the opposite front leg.

- ◆ Do they appear to move forward at the same time?
- ◆ Do they appear to move forward at distinctly separate times?

3. Look at the bottom of the hooves on the legs nearest you.

- ◆ Do they appear to leave the ground close in time together?
- ◆ Do they leave the ground with long intervals between each hoof pick up?
- ◆ Do they appear to set down exactly at the same time?
- ◆ Do they appear to set down with a longer time between each hoof fall?
- ◆ Do they appear to set down with the hind hitting just before the front?

What Gait Is It?

4. Look at the bottom of the hooves on the 2 legs diagonal of one another.

- ◆ Do they appear to set down with front hitting just before the opposite hind?
- ◆ Do they appear to set down at exactly the same time?
- ◆ Do they appear to set down separately with relatively long intervals between set downs?

The Rest Of The Horse

1. Watch the Whole Horse

- ◆ Look at how the back moves. Is it bouncing up and down or does it remain level?
- ◆ Look at how the croup moves, does it stay level or does it bob up and down?

2. Look at the Head and Neck.

- ◆ Does the head and neck remain relatively still?
- ◆ Does the head and neck move up and down in a vertical motion?
- ◆ Does the head and neck move from side to side?

3. Look at the Tail.

- ◆ Does the tail work in a bobbing motion up and down?
- ◆ Does the tail swing from side to side?

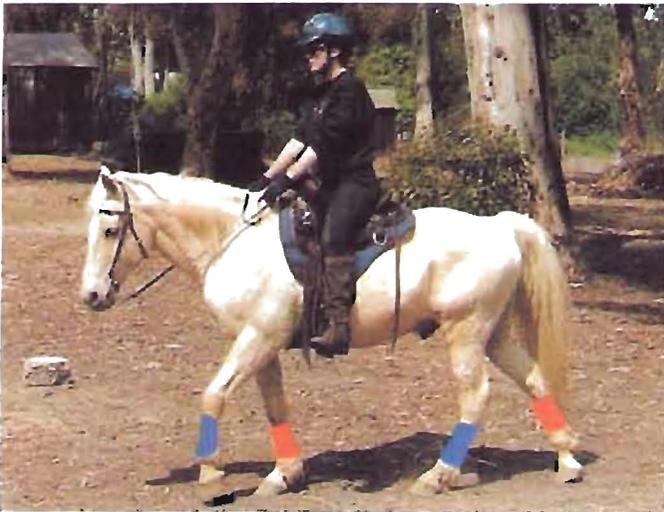


Photo #1

Left Hind has just set down forward with full weight bearing.

Left Fore has lifted off and is moving forward.

Right Hind is still bearing some weight at the toe, but starting to lift off the ground getting ready to move forward.

Right Fore is in full weight bearing position and will soon start lift-off.

Each leg is working independently of the others.

Take note of the head position in relation to changes in the next photos. Also notice the movement of the tail as the photos progress.

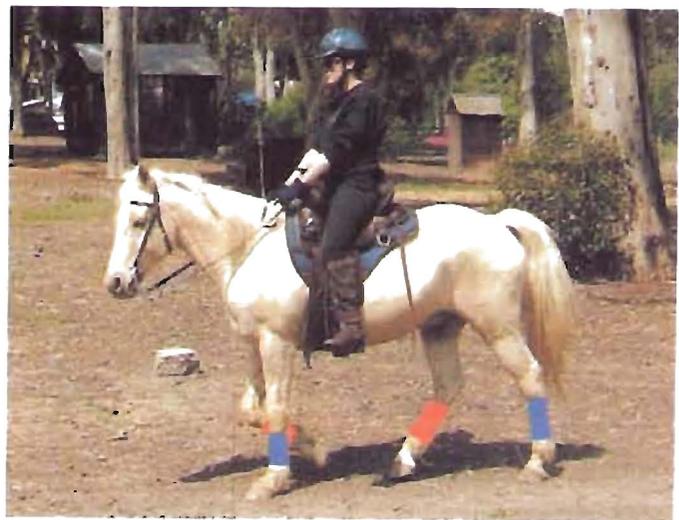


Photo #2

Left Hind is in full weight bearing position, but now positioned more under the horse, soon to start lift-off.

Left Fore is in full weight bearing position.

Right Hind is in forward advancement getting ready to set down.

Right Fore has lifted off and is in forward advancement position - yet not quite to the halfway point in forward advancement.

Again each leg is working independently.

Other Factors to Consider

1. How much energy is the horse utilizing to execute the gait?

- ◆ Some gaits require more than others.

2. What are the qualities of a gait?

- ◆ Smoothness
- ◆ Reach of forelegs (length of stride)
- ◆ Lift and fold of front legs, more or less
- ◆ Capping of hooves (the hind foot steps over the track of the forefoot on the same side) to length of overstride
- ◆ Speed

When considering quality factors the gait correct gait must be achieved first and foremost as shown through the hooves and legs. Other movements are just nice extras that may or may not be present in an individual in varying degrees.

Now let's move on to our photos and I will give you some indication as to what this horse may be doing.

What gait is it?

See page 64 for answer.

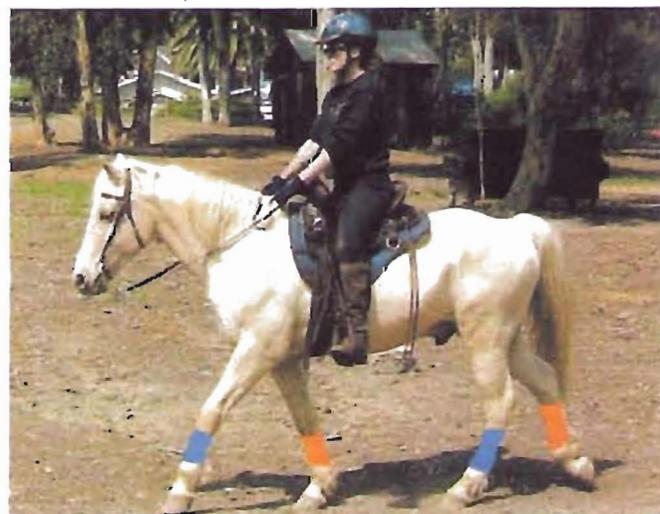


Photo #3

Left Hind has just lifted off with no ground contact, starting forward advancement.

Left Fore is just starting to lift off the ground with some toe contact, but no forward advancement as of yet.

Right Hind is in full weight-bearing position working directly under the horse's hindquarter.

Right Fore has just finished forward advancement setting down working toward full weight bearing. Each leg is working independently of the others.

Photo #4

Left Hind has just set down, finishing forward advancement, and is in weight-bearing position.

Left Fore is still in forward advancement with no contact but on the downward direction with the toe about to touch.

Right Hind has lifted off and is in forward advancement, but not to the halfway point in that advancement.

Right Fore is in full weight bearing position soon to lift off at the heel.

Each leg is working independently.



From page 59

What Gait Is It?

This gait is a flat walk.

The legs are working independently of each other at all times. The raising and lowering of the head is an added indication of the gait as is the wave of the tail from side to side.

This horse's back is also in a neutral position, not round or hollow.

Many people would confuse this with a running walk, but the horse is not utilizing the energy needed for the more pull of the front legs and push of the hinds needed for a running walk.

Some added notes...

The saddle is working in a downhill orientation, if the back rigging were being used this may correct this while helping free up the shoulders for maximum freedom of movement. Note the rider's slight changes in pelvic position, rolling slightly forward and back. This is a common effect of the flat walk.

With saddle correction and the rider's use of seat and leg aids to engage the horses hindquarters more this horse would easily move up into the gait of running walk.