



Dr. Beverly Gordon

Gordon Chiropractic, P.C.
www.TheHorseInMotion.com
TheHorseInMotion@aol.com
EquineDC@aol.com

The Horse In Motion, LLC, Pres.
Oyster Bay, NY 11771
Wellington, FL, 33414
cell # (516) 606-4141

The Perfect Sitting trot

As I began to write this article (in response to requests from several readers) I realized the great undertaking it would be. Certainly, if I attempted to discuss components of developing the “perfect sitting trot”, I would need at least the confines of a book for the discussion. That is, if indeed anyone can actually be perfect at anything having to do with horses, which I doubt. I subscribe to the notion that as humans we can’t live long enough to learn enough from our horses to be perfect at anything related to them. That being said....

To sit the trot perfectly, in wonderful balance, feeling the overwhelming power and movement of the horse, is an elusive endeavor which encompasses an overwhelming degree of variables. Both the rider and horse play an integral role. Therefore, so that I can offer you information you can immediately use to help you get closer to the goal of a “perfect sitting trot”, I chose exercises to help you more easily develop *feel*.

Before we begin discussing exercises, let’s start by understanding sitting the trot is basically about balance. Most problems occur as the result of an off balanced rider gripping, bouncing, or pulling on the reins. The key is to relax certain muscles while contracting others. If you just relaxed everything you would bounce out of the saddle and lose all connection you have with the horse’s movement. Developing “muscle independence”, that is, using certain muscles while relaxing others, allows you to *passively* direct the horse’s movement without interfering with it.

Posture, Balance and Mental Images

In order to have true muscle independence, you need to begin with good balance. Regardless of your discipline, muscle independence can be more easily achieved through good posture and strong core muscles. This enables a more independent use of the seat, a necessary ingredient in the sitting trot. Here are some methods you can use to improve your seat aids, your muscle independence, and therefore, your sitting trot.

Centering

First, let’s start with your posture. You will need to ‘center’ yourself. This will help you balance yourself and prepare for the sitting trot. Sit quietly on your horse and ‘grow tall’. Think of everything from the waist up stretching up, and everything from the waist down reaching down. While staying as relaxed as you can, you will have to engage your core muscles to achieve balance and independence. The core muscles are the stabilizers (therefore a sit- up here and there wouldn’t hurt). Allow your shoulders to relax and drop

away from your ears . Do not lean forward or back. Do not over arch or flatten your back (your natural arch should remain). Just sit quiet, straight, with strong core muscles, and your legs reaching down and surrounding the horse. Feel that you have the same weight flowing down the front of your legs as you do the back. Also, think of allowing the horse to lift his back up under your seat, so don't sit heavy driving your seat bones into the horses back. Let your hip joint open, but do not allow your toes or knees to rotate outward, as this jams the hip joints. Think of having relaxed, breathing aids absorbing the horse's energy.

Biomechanics

To sit effectively in the saddle, without interfering with the horse's movement, you need to understand the path the saddle follows in space as the horse trots .As the horse's back rises and falls with the trot, so does the saddle. Think of the sitting trot as consisting of 2 phases. In the first phase, the horse pushes up and forward off the ground. In the second phase, the horse returns back to the ground and prepares to push off again on the opposite diagonal. (Differences in saddle position relative to each diagonal will not be addressed in this article)

By far the most common moment in the horse's trot for riders to encounter problems is during the second phase of saddle movement as the horse switches diagonals. Most riders actively try to move their seat forward (phase 1) then back (phase 2), but, in fact, the saddle never moves back, but always moves forward in space. So, after the initial rise during phase one, if you are not sufficiently stabilized with your core, and relaxed in your seat, the saddle will drop away from you, and when your seat finally drops back to the saddle, the saddle will be moving up in space and will collide with your seat. The saddle, though it "drops" in space during phase 2, still moves forward, and your seat needs to do the same.

Exercises

The first exercise to try involves dropping alternate seat bones every 3-4 strides during the sitting trot. First drop your right seat bone down and forward with the movement, then your left, then your right again. It is important that your core stabilize your upper body so you do not lean when you drop each seat bone. Your shoulders remain level and your body should stay in the midline of the saddle. You can check that your upper body does not move when you drop your seat bones by standing in front of a mirror as if you were on horseback and dropping each seat bone alternately. This exercise helps you develop good "muscle independence", as you will have to relax the muscles on the side of the dropped seat bones. And teaches you to drop into the saddle and follow the motion of the horse.

In this second exercise, you will begin by "centering" yourself as previously discussed. Once you feel "centered", sit the trot 5 – 10 strides, then re-center, then walk. Re-center then trot. Do not post. Perform these transitions on a straight line, and on circle, both directions. This exercise helps develop the ability to center yourself with the movement of the horse.

The third exercise involves riding large loop serpentines. Sit the trot during the turns and post between changes of direction. You can also do this exercise on a circle. Post through half and sit through half. Check that your horse does not slow down and lose impulsion when you sit. Think of riding forward. You will find it helpful to “center” and relax when going from posting to sitting trot. As you become more proficient, begin sitting for longer periods of time.

Striving for that “perfect sitting trot” will ultimately lead you toward better riding. Practicing skills to become more proficient at sitting the horse’s trot will improve your balance, use of your seat, effectiveness of your aids, and overall riding ability. As it has often been said, “practice makes perfect”.

Until next time,

Dr. Bev Gordon