



## 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

---

### Understanding Basic Gaits

At a clinic I gave recently, I asked a question which I assumed would be simple to answer, even for these beginner riders. I have always believed that knowing, or 'feeling' what each of your horse's legs are doing during any point of any movement is paramount to good riding. I also know how important it is to understand where, and how the horse's feet are *supposed* to move if we wish to influence the movement. So to this end, I began by asking my students to explain the natural footfalls of the common primary gaits - walk, trot, canter, and gallop. I was quite surprised to see blank looks on the faces of at least half the students. So, I thought it might be helpful to clarify the movements of the primary, basic gaits in this month's article.

Let's start by discussing the gaits themselves. This discussion will concentrate on the four common primary gaits. There are other gaits inherent (or trained) in the movements of specific breeds, such as with the gaited horses, or pacers. But in this article we will primarily discuss the walk, the trot, the canter, and finally the gallop.

Each gait is differentiated by its specific footfalls (*order* of foot placement) and its beat (*number* of footfalls which occur before the pattern begins again.) Remember, the number of beats and the order of footfalls for each specific gait *never* change, regardless of the movement being performed.

### **Here are the beats and the footfall order for the primary gaits:**

**WALK-** Four Beats in the following order:

- 1) right hind
- 2) right front
- 3) left hind
- 4) left front

**TROT -** Two beats in the following order:

- 1) right hind/ left front
- 2) left hind/ right front

**CANTER**, right lead - Three beats in the following order:

- 1) left hind
- 2) right hind/ left front
- 3) right front

**CANTER**, left lead - Three beats in the following order:

- 1) right hind
- 2) left hind/right front
- 3) left front

**GALLOP**, right lead- Four beats in the following order:

- 1) left hind
- 2) right hind
- 3) left front
- 4) right front

**GALLOP**, left lead- Four beats in the following order:

- 1) right hind
- 2) left hind
- 3) right front
- 4) left front

Note that although the gallop is 4 beats, just as the walk is 4 beats, the footfall order more closely resembles that of the canter, with the exception being the separation of the diagonal pair of legs into two separate steps instead of one simultaneous step.

Leads are named for whichever front foot is forward at the end of the stride.

Basically, in a straight line, all gaits are performed on *two* tracks where the hind foot lands in line (on the same track) with the corresponding front foot. One track for the left pair of legs, and one for the right, thereby making two tracks. However, movements done in any particular direction or on any particular figure might change the number of tracks on which the horse travels, or the pattern the horse makes with his footfalls. The gaits, however, should always remain pure, with the number of beats and order of footfalls never changing. For example, a shoulder-in performed at both the walk and the trot will be on three tracks instead of two. But the walk will still be four beat and the trot will still be two beat, and the order of footfalls in each gait will still remain the same.

Once you are familiar with how the horse is supposed to move his feet in each gait try to *feel* the horse's footfalls so you can become familiar with where each foot is during any part of the stride. Your ability to influence your

horse's performance is directly related to understanding, and feeling movement. And isn't that what good riding is all about?

Until next time,

Dr. Bev Gordon

