

GAIT RECOGNITION

by Nya Bates, Freelance Writer Going Gaited Magazine on line

Nya and Rocky Bates operate Bates Gaited Horses in Melba, Idaho. Nya has been actively involved with horses all of her life and, specifically with Tennessee Walking Horses since 1974. The Bates offer training, gait clinics for all gaited breeds and stand two stallions (TWHBEA & Tennessee Walking Horse Heritage Society Certified). The Bates' stallion, Go Boy's Windwalker, was NPWHA Champion in Halter, English & Western and also PCWHA Champion in Halter and Under Saddle. Their focus is pleasure horses for trail and rail, driving, field trial and hunting. An active member with FOSH (Friends of Sound Horses) Nya was awarded the Trainer of the Year as well as Breeder of the Year for 2010.



All gaited horses are born with a natural gait tendency that can and will vary through the gait spectrum regardless of their specific breeds. There are many different names for the gaits that these horses are able to do which, although they will reflect the language of their country of origin, they are basically the same gaits. Most gaited horses will have a natural gait thread in which they are able to perform an easy gait at a certain speed and, when they can no longer travel in that gait (or gear), will alter their gait. In defining the intermediate gaits one must use footfall sequence, footfall timing, hoof support sequence and weight transfer.

The **Ordinary Walk** (which all horses perform) is an even timed four beat gait as each hoof lifts and sets down at even and separate intervals and is the basic gait for all of the easy gaits. The footfall sequence is right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore. Even pick up and set down of hooves. Walking step front and rear.



The **Flat Walk** is identical to the ordinary Walk but is faster and has a longer stride. The flat foot walk is a bold four beat gait with reach in every stride from both front and rear legs. There is an over stride of the front track with the rear legs. The horse should move with no sense of cramped motion or laboring from the hocks. The footfall sequence is right hind, right fore, left hind, left fore. Even pick up and set down of hooves. 4/6 mph



The **Running Walk** has the same footfall and timing as the Flat and ordinary Walk with more over stride and speed. To create the proper timing, a hind foot is always one half stride behind the front foot. The rear legs track straight over the tracks of the front feet and must appear to move effortlessly. The horse appears to pull with the front legs and drive from his rear legs. There is an over stride of the front track with the rear legs with no sense of cramped motion or laboring from the hocks. The footfall sequence is left hind, left front, right hind, right front. Even pick up and set down of hooves. Running step in front and walking step behind. 7-10 mph



The **Rack** has the same footfall and timing as do the ordinary, Flat and Running Walks with more speed and a shorter length of stride. The rack is often referred to as a Single Foot as it has a four beat gait where each foot hits the ground in a moment of individual action. The footfall is one foot down and three feet in various stages of elevation. Leaping step with weight transfer in mid-air, front and hind. Speeds can go up to 25 mph



Diagonal Gaits

Trot and Foxtrot

The **Trot** is a two beat gait in which the diagonal legs lift off and set down at the same time. Even diagonal pick up and set down. Weight transfer in mid-air so the transverse pairs are never on the ground at the same time. There is a moment of suspension when all four feet are off the ground. 6 mph (more for racing).



The **Foxtrot** is a broken diagonal gait in which the hooves set down at separate intervals. The horse should appear to be walking with the front legs and trotting with the rear legs with a sliding action. The foxtrot is a two-foot, three-foot support sequence. Diagonal uneven pick up and set down of hooves. It has a walking step in front at slow speeds with a running step in front at faster speeds with a trotting step behind. 6-10 mph



The Lateral Gaits

Pace and Step-Pace

The **Pace** is a two beat gait in which the lateral legs lift off and set down at the same time. There is a moment of suspension when all four feet are off the ground between the set down of each set of lateral legs. The sequence is left fore and rear leg and then right fore and right hind legs. The weight transfer is in the air and transverse leg pairs are never on the ground at the same time. Speed can be as much as 10 mph (more for racing).



The **Step-Pace** is a broken lateral gait in which the hooves on one side of the horse lift off at the same time but the hind feet set down just ahead of the fore feet. There is no suspension which makes this gait smooth. This is a two-foot, three-foot support gait. Weight transfer is walking step at slow speeds and a running step at faster speeds. 4-10 mph

