



Icelandic Horse Connection

When to Canter (Lope) / Does it Ruin Gait?

This is a good article by Brandon that pertains to the canter / lope of the Icelandic Horse and all other gaited horses.

By Brandon Carpenter:

I have never experienced a lope causing any damage to the consistency of intermediate gaits. It is a gait in itself that is entirely different from any of the intermediate gaits. Because it is NOT an intermediate gait. There should be no reason in the world that the lope will do anything other than exercise different muscle groups working at that gait.

When training a new horse, I do all the ground work, then ride in the corral a couple of times (usually not more than 2 or 3 - 10 minute rides) then get the horse out into open country. I ride long enough to make sure the turns and stop and back work in the new environment, then ask for more speed. I'll trot, pace, fox trot, fino fino, paso llano, tolt, rack, stepping pace, running walk, or accept any other gait the horse will give me. Usually most horses will give several combinations of different gaits. It isn't about attaining a specific consistent gait at this point. That work will come a short time later.

Towards the end of this ride (usually about 20 - 30 minutes) I'll ask the horse to lope for a couple hundred yards. It helps to dissipate any remaining uneasiness. It helps the horse to blow off any extra nervous energy you feel it has. As my dad has always said about this initial

lope, "a lope is better than a buck."

Getting a lope during this first ride helps the horse to understand that there are no boundaries concerning what I will ask it to do. Often the horse is overwhelmed mentally and emotionally the first few rides. We are really just stealing rides from them. That is why I don't expect too much from them at this point. Sometimes it is the best time to push the envelope because they tend to not be very resistant the first few rides.

I don't expect any consistency or necessary rate of speed at the lope, just the effort from the horse.

How should we ride the horse at a lope?

Ride like you would any other time to support the horse. If you need more speed, ride with energy forward and up, yet balanced over the back. If you want consistency of speed in gait ride balanced over the back. If you want slower, drop and drag your energy and ride balanced over the back.

The key is ride BALANCED like you know you should to help the horse just as you would at any other gait. Move with your horse as one unit; relaxed. Most of your weight should be on the saddle and just enough weight on the stirrups to hold them in place. If that sounds like how you would ride when in a flat walk or the intermediate gaits, then you know what to do.

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