

What Is Our Seat?

By: Jennifer Bauer

As you know, you can't build a house without a foundation right? So what is the foundation of riding? There is a foundation in everything, a house, a meal, and even a party. A foundation is where everything starts. In riding, the foundation of our riding is through our seat. All the aids are extremely important but everything starts through our seat. Our seat is where everything begins, if we start anywhere else, we start to contort our body. If we have a solid foundation in our seat, the other aids will be easier to use and our horse will become lighter and softer.



*Image #1
(Correct Position)*



*Image #2
(Too far Forward)*



*Image #3
(Too far Back)*

What is our seat? Our seat is the area that touches the saddle from calf to calf. This area also involves our legs and our leg aids, but our leg aids will follow our seat. The seat begins in our pelvis and in our hips. In this area we are able to rotate in many different ways to help and hinder our horse. The hip joints are where the foundation begins, this is where we turn from and ask our horse to stop and go.

Our seat is our foundation for riding therefore if the seat isn't solid the rest of the body will be unstable. In a perfect world, the seat of a rider will be solid and level but I know a lot of riders who are crooked by confirmation faults that they cannot help. I also know that some of these people do a great job of finding their center of balance and use this to compensate for crookedness in the skeleton, so they have a solid foundation. By having a low and level center of balance in their seat they can move their pelvis and hips in a very useful fashion, which allows the horse to use their center of balance and be able to move freely. When you have a great seat, it doesn't always matter how crooked you are everywhere else because you'll be solid and free so the horse can use himself, but if that foundation isn't there, it doesn't matter if everything else is perfect, the foundation will be unstable.

The foundation of your riding is your seat and needs to have stability, but when I work on my seat, what I try to work on is the dynamic stability, a stable seat in motion. Just like the horse, how I practice different maneuvers still and in motion, I work on the same thing myself. I need to find this myself when I am still. One of the best ways to work on your own seat is with pictures (a great advantage today is pictures on your phone). (See image #1)

If my seat is too far forward I will fall forward in motion.
(See image #2)

If my seat is too far back, the horse will push me backwards.
(See image #3)

With these pictures also you'll see how my seat can block the energy flow from back to front. This will build braces in the horse in the middle of his back so my horse cannot come through to the bit. My seat needs to be stable for me and flowing for my horse.

Now that there is an idea of stability at the stand still, what about stability in motion. When working on stability in motion, this gives my horse direction and impulsion in motion. If my seat is not stable or loose I am going to gain neither. When working on this I am going to allow my horse to move me and then be able to change the movement of my horse. When you are on your horse, allow the horse to move you and get in rhythm with the horse and feel the horse's foot movement. Once you feel the horse's movement you can change the movement in forward, halt, and back. In this movement you will also be able to control direction from left to right.

A great exercise for both horse and rider to work on this position and to help the horse understand what the seat means is transitions. What you can do with your horse is ride the horse forward a couple steps, halt, and back up. When you are riding your horse try to think of an exercise ball. Ride the horse forward (roll your ball forward), halt your horse (halt the ball), and then back your horse (roll your ball back). The reason I use an exercise ball is because it's a great way to work your seat. If you do too much with your shoulders or feet, the ball will not move, but if you use your seat to move the ball, the ball will freely move. It's a great exercise for your horse also because you are doing multiple transitions which will help his flexibility and following your seat.

The seat is the foundation of our riding. If you have a solid foundation the horse will be able to move freely under you and in whatever movement your horse does you will be stable and the communication will be clear. A clear and solid foundation is what every rider should have during riding because it is our foundation, and every house needs a foundation.

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