

SMOOTH RIDE SNIPPETS

In the frame

A correct frame is essential for a horse to maintain a quality gait, writes **Beverly Whittington**



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Beverly Whittington

Beverly Whittington has owned, trained and written about gaited horses for over 30 years. She has published numerous books and runs a gaited horse website at www.gaitedhorses.net

The foundation of strong gait is a horse's breeding and inherited conformation. However, as with any construction, a solid foundation will need strong framework to achieve the desired result. The best gait under saddle results from strengthening factors that enable a horse to maintain it. These include the frame required for the specific gait, BFC (balance, forward movement and cadence) and impulsion.

Here we are going to focus on the frame. Each smooth gait requires a different frame for the horse to maintain gait. Look at the silhouette of a horse maintaining a Foxtrot, you can see that it is not the same as a horse maintaining a Rack or even a Running Walk yet each of these is a smooth gait.

A horse's conformation and breeding will predisposition him towards one of these gaits but it is the rider's job to create a strong frame to allow it to maintain the gait while under saddle. You should teach the horse to maintain its frame without excessive pushing from the legs or holding with the hands. It is very important that the horse learns to maintain its own frame, not have the rider enforce it. This takes practice as the horse is now not only responsible for its own weight but also that of the rider.

6 week old Spanish Jennet Filly, owned by Beverly Whittington



BASIC FRAME IN...

The Rack

Also known as:

Fino, Corto, Largo, Rocky Mountain horse Pleasure Gait, Trippel, Singlefoot, Fox Rack, Stepping Rack, Hreina, Pure Tolt and Fast Largo



Outline:

Steady, upright neck carriage breaking at the poll with the head nearing the vertical, ventroflexed back, 'up and down' motion of the croup, active hocks. All versions of the rack require that a horse raise his head and neck, forming a 'dip' just before the withers

BASIC FRAME IN...



The Foxtrot

Also known as:

Trocha in Paso Finos, Pasitrote in Peruvians, Trab Tolt in Icelandic Ponies and Slow Gait in Saddlebreds

Outline:

Head should be carried at an angle parallel to the shoulder and at the height so the eye is as high as the top of the withers – there will be some head shake. The back is fairly level or slightly dosiflexed, the horse elevates his shoulder and breaks at the pole; the horse carries his nose slightly out

DFE's Future Is a Dun, Missouri Fox Trotter stallion owned by Tim and Jenny Meyer of Bridle Ridge Gaited Horses



BASIC FRAME IN...



The Running Walk

Outline:

Big, loose, naturally square stride; the horse must learn to carry himself in a balanced, engaged neutral frame with a level back to perform the gait correctly in a relaxed and energy efficient manner. The neck should be gracefully arched from the withers all the way through the poll in a continuous line, head slightly forward of the vertical. The croup of the horse is steady as the hind end engages and the rear hooves take long reaching strides.

Your goal is to encourage the horse to seek the frame for his specific gait. Start by strengthening and correcting the frame at the walk. Continue until the horse is able to maintain frame without interference from the rider for long distances. Then ask for an increase of speed in frame, allowing the horse to continue if he moves into the sought after gait, bringing him back to a walk if not. Focus on your horse's body action and posture. Feel the way his back, hips and shoulders function when he's gaitting correctly; his balance and carriage. You do not want to push him into frame; rather you want to gently correct him from taking a different one. When you ride you simply use mild pressure from your hands, seat or legs to bring the neck and back into the correct shape. You set the head after you

Diplomat's Delight, Tennessee Walking Horse owned by Gwen Mobery



“The neck should be gracefully arched from the withers all the way through the poll in a continuous line, head slightly forward of the vertical”

have the neck and back carriage correct.

Both the Foxtrot and Running Walk require enough give in the reins to allow a horse to nod his head while requesting he flex a little at the poll as he performs. Think of this work as if you are channeling the horse's efforts. When he gets it right there should be little to no pressure on the reins and no driving pressure from your seat or legs. When he is incorrect the seat, leg or

mild bit pressure let him know that is not what you want. This is the first step to self carriage.

Just getting the correct frame will not guarantee the horse will be able to maintain the desired gait for any length of time. Next comes BFC (balance, forward movement and cadence) and impulsion but first thing first, get the frame correct so you have something to build on.