

THE ART OF CLASSICAL DRESSAGE RIDING

CANTER AND GALLOP (PART 1)

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THE CANTER AND GALLOP ARE VARIATIONS ON THE FASTEST GAIT THAT CAN BE PERFORMED BY A HORSE OR OTHER EQUINE. THE CANTER IS A CONTROLLED, THREE-BEAT GAIT, WHILE THE GALLOP IS A FASTER, 4 BEAT VARIATION OF THE SAME GAIT. IT IS A NATURAL GAIT POSSESSED BY ALL HORSES, FASTER THAN MOST HORSES' TROT, OR AMBLING GAITS. THE GALLOP IS THE FASTEST GAIT OF THE HORSE, AVERAGING ABOUT 40 TO 48 KILOMETRES PER HOUR (25 TO 30 MPH). THE SPEED OF THE CANTER VARIES BETWEEN 16 AND 27 KILOMETRES PER HOUR (10 AND 17 MPH) DEPENDING ON THE LENGTH OF THE STRIDE OF THE HORSE. A VARIATION OF THE CANTER, SEEN IN WESTERN RIDING, IS CALLED A LOPE, AND GENERALLY IS QUITE SLOW, NO MORE THAN 13–19 KILOMETRES PER HOUR (8–12 MPH).

ETYMOLOGY

Since the earliest dictionaries there has been a commonly agreed suggestion that the origin of the word “**canter**” comes from the English city of Canterbury, a place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, as referred to in *The Canterbury Tales*, where the comfortable speed for a pilgrim travelling some distance on horseback was above that of a trot but below that of a gallop. However the lack of the compelling evidence made the 18th-century equestrian **Richard Berenger** remark in *The History and Art of Horsemanship* that “*the definition must certainly puzzle all who are horsemen and all who are not*”, and suggest his own derivation, noted in contemporary dictionaries, from the Latin word *cantherius*, a gelding, known of the calmness of the temper.

SEQUENCE OF FOOTFALLS

The canter is a three-beat gait, meaning that there are three footfalls heard per stride. Each footfall is the “**grounding**” phase of a leg. The three footfalls are evenly spaced, and followed by the “**suspension**” phase of the gait, which is when all four legs are off the ground. The three beats and suspension are considered one stride. The movement for one stride is as follows:

1. **Beat One:** the grounding phase of the outside hind leg. There are many riders who think a front leg is the first

beat of the canter, which is incorrect. At this time, the other three legs are off the ground.

2. **Beat Two:** the simultaneous grounding phase of the inside hind leg and outside fore leg. The inside fore leg is still off the ground. The outside hind leg (beat one), is still touching the ground, but is about to be lifted off. At the gallop, this beat is divided, with the inside hind landing first, making the gallop a four-beat gait

3. **Beat Three:** the grounding phase of the inside foreleg. The outside hind leg (beat one), is off the ground. The inside hind leg and outside foreleg are still touching the ground, but are about to be lifted up.

4. The inside hindleg and outside foreleg (beat two) are lifted off the ground. The inside foreleg is the only foot supporting the horse's weight.

5. The inside foreleg is lifted off the ground.

6. **Suspension:** the horse has all four legs off the ground. The faster the horse is moving, the longer is the time of the phase of suspension.

GALLOP

The diagonal pair (in this case, right hind and left fore) is no longer in sync at the gallop.

The canter and gallop are related

gaits, as the rider simply asks the horse to gallop from the canter by allowing it to lengthen its stride. When the stride is sufficiently lengthened, the diagonal pair of beat two breaks, resulting in a four beat gait, the inside hind striking first, before the outside fore. A careful listener or observer can tell an extended canter from a gallop by the presence of the fourth beat.

The gallop is the fastest gait of the horse, averaging about **25 to 30** miles per hour (40 to 48 km/h), and in the wild is used when the animal needs to flee from predators or simply cover short distances quickly. Horses seldom will gallop more than 1 or 2 miles (1.6 or 3.2 km) before they need to rest, though horses can sustain a moderately paced gallop for longer distances before they become winded and have to slow down.

Although the walk, trot, and canter can be collected to very short, engaged strides, the gallop if collected will turn back into a canter. The “**hand gallop**” of the show ring is not merely an extended canter, but a true lengthening of stride, yet still fully under control by the rider. A racing gallop, in contrast, pushes the horse to the limits of its speed.

The fastest galloping speed is achieved by the American Quarter



Horse, which in a short sprint of a quarter mile (0.25 miles (0.40 km)) or less has been clocked at speeds approaching 55 miles per hour (88.5 km/h). The Guinness Book of World Records lists a Thoroughbred as having averaged 43.97 miles per hour (70.76 km/h) over a two-furlong (0.25 miles (402 m)) distance in 2008.

LEADS

The “lead” of a canter refers to the order in which the footfalls occur. If the left hind leg is placed first (beat one), which would then be followed by the right hind and left foreleg (beat two), before the right foreleg (beat three), the horse is said to be on the “right lead.” If the right hind

leg is beat one, then the left foreleg will be the last leg to ground, and the horse will be said to be on the “left lead.” Therefore, a person on the ground can tell which lead the horse is on by watching the front and rear legs and determining which side the legs are literally “leading”, landing in front of the opposing side.

When the horse is on a lead, the legs on the inside front and hind, have greater extension than the outside front and hind. Therefore, a horse on the right lead will have its right hind (beat two) come slightly further under its body than the left hindleg had when it grounded (beat one), and the right foreleg (beat three) will reach further out

from the horse’s body than the left foreleg had extended (beat two).

In general, the horse is on the “correct” lead when it matches the direction it is going. So a horse turning to the right is on the right lead, a horse turning to the left is on the left lead. However, just as people find it easier to write with one hand or the other, most horses have a “better side”, on which they find it easier to lead at a canter. In limited circumstances, mostly in dressage training, a horse may be deliberately asked to take the lead opposite of the direction it is traveling. In such cases, this type of canter is called a counter-canter.

A variant canter, involving the same sequence of beats but variant footfalls in beats one and two, is often referred to by equestrians as cross-firing, cross-cantering, or disunited canter, among other terms. To the observer, the horse appears to be leading with one leg in front, but the opposite leg behind. It is produced by an improper sequence of footfalls. In other animals, such as racing dogs, this footfall sequence may be normal.

The problem with this sequence is in beat two: the grounded hind and foreleg are NOT diagonal pairs, but are on the same side of the horse (in this case, the outside). This means that the horse is balancing on only one side of its body, which is very difficult for the horse, making it hard to keep the animal balanced, rhythmical, and keeping impulsion.

A horse that is cross-firing cannot perform to the best of its ability, and can even be dangerous (such as an unbalanced, cross-firing horse who must jump a huge, solid cross-country obstacle). Additionally, it makes for a very uncomfortable, awkward ride, producing a rolling movement often described as riding an eggbeater, which makes it difficult for the rider to perform to the best of his or her abilities. TM

Reference: Wikipedia



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Photos: Judith Wich-Wenning

The amazing full sisters Orienta Aysha and Orienta Ameera (Al Adeed Al Shaqab x Ansata Azali)



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