

# THE WALK

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**WALK DEFINED.** A CLEAR "FOUR-BEAT" GAIT WITH FOOTFALLS FOLLOWING ONE ANOTHER. THIS GAIT HAS A CLEAR, EVEN RHYTHM AS THE FEET LAND AND TAKE OFF. THERE ARE 4 VARIATIONS OF THE WALK - THE COLLECTED WALK, THE MEDIUM WALK, THE EXTENDED WALK AND THE FREE WALK.

**How to Execute the Walk.** Start at a halt, tighten abdominals and deepen the seat. Keep upper body straight, close both calves on the horse's side, maintain rein contact, but yield slightly, relax seat and calves and follow the movement at the walk.

If the rider imposes too much in the walk by restricting with the hands or trying to force overstepping, the horse will lose the purity of his gait. This can be detrimental given that the walk is the only movement that consistently holds a co-efficient of 2 from the training level through the Grand Prix in dressage tests.

When the horse is walking, the rider's hands to move with the horse by maintaining elasticity in the elbows. As the horse's head moves forward and down, the elbows should open. When the horse's head comes back up the elbows should close. This allows for a consistent, soft contact with the horse's mouth. Thus resulting in a fluid, pure walk where the horse is swinging through the back.

**Purpose of the Walk.** To relax the horse after exertion. To provide a slower rate of speed when learning new movements.

**Common Errors in Execution.** The horse jigs or prance. The horse walks laterally (both feet on the same side moving instead of opposing sides). The rider restricts the horse's movement with a rigid hand. The rider tries to force overstepping. The horse lacks energy and drags his toes.

**Medium walk.** A clear, regular and unconstrained walk of moderate lengthening. The horse, remaining "on the bit", walks energetically but relaxed with even and determined steps, the hind feet touching the ground in front of the hoof prints of the fore feet. The rider maintains a light, soft and steady contact with the mouth, allowing the natural movement of the horse's head and neck.

**Collected walk.** The horse, remains "on the bit", moves resolutely forward, with its neck raised and arched and showing a clear self-carriage. The head approaches the vertical position and a light contact is maintained with the mouth. The hind legs are engaged with good hock action. The pace should remain marching and vigorous, the feet

being placed in regular sequence. The steps cover less ground and are higher than at the medium walk, because all the joints bend more markedly. The Collected walk is shorter than the Medium walk, although showing greater activity.

**Extended walk.** The horse covers as much ground as possible, without haste and without losing the regularity of the steps. The hind feet touch the ground clearly in front of the hoof prints of the fore feet. The rider allows the horse to stretch out the head and neck (forward and downwards) without losing contact with the mouth and control of the poll. The nose must be clearly in front of the vertical.

**Free Walk.** The free walk is a pace of relaxation in which the horse is allowed complete freedom to lower and stretch out his head and neck. The degree of ground cover and length of strides, with hind feet stepping clearly in front of the footprints of the front feet, are essential to the quality of the free walk. The walk is a pace in four (4)-beat rhythm with eight (8) phases (numbers in circles indicate the beat).

**Stretching on a long rein.** This exercise gives a clear impression of the "throughness" of the horse and proves its balance, suppleness, obedience and relaxation. In order to execute the exercise "stretching on a long rein" correctly, the rider must lengthen the reins as the horse stretches gradually forward and downward. As the neck stretches forwards and downwards, the mouth should reach more or less to the horizontal line corresponding with the point of the shoulder. An elastic and consistent contact with the rider's hands must be maintained. The pace must maintain its rhythm, and the horse should remain light in the shoulders with the hind-legs well engaged. During the retake of the reins the horse must accept the contact without resistance in the mouth or poll. 

*Source of the article*  
- Dressage Academy  
- FEI Dressage Rules