

UNDERSTANDING POSITION & BALANCE

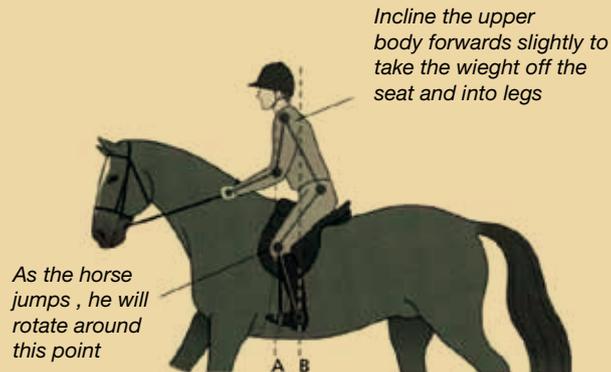
By Khaled Assem

YOU NEED TO WORK ON THREE DIMENSIONS WHEN CONSIDERING BALANCE WHILE RIDING: YOUR OWN BALANCE, THE HORSE'S, AND THE BALANCE OF HORSE AND RIDER TOGETHER. CONSEQUENTLY, YOU HAVE TO CONSIDER :THE FOLLOWING

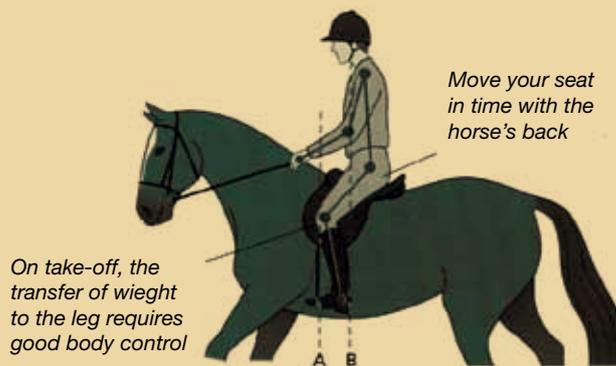
THE HORSE'S NATURAL BALANCE:

In a standing position, the centre of gravity is situated approximately half way between the withers and stomach which is the area under the saddle flaps close to the girth line. 60% of the weight is on the forelegs and 40% is on the hind ones.

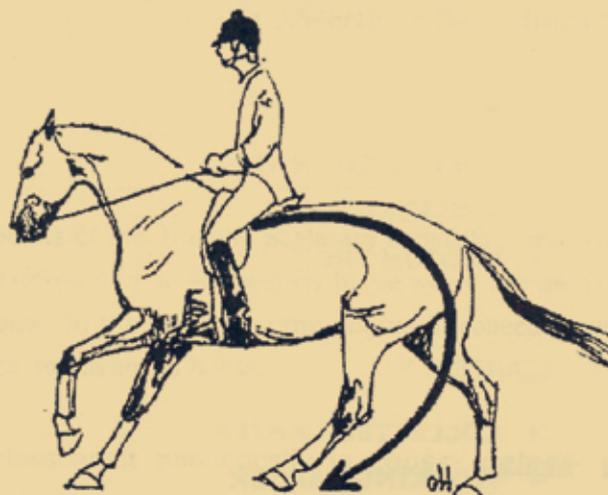
A well trained horse can carry 50% of his weight on his hind quarters making him lighter on the front end, appearing to be going uphill. I recall my late trainer Paul Dharragh saying, "the horse is like a seesaw with ever changing balance", hence the rider has to keep the front end high and light whilst engaging more the hind end to get submissiveness, control and efficiency.



In this position, the rider's shoulders are over the knees, taking the weight off the seat & into the legs called the *toe*



As your horse becomes more advanced & carries more weight in his hind quarters, you can put more weight in the saddle



Well engaged hind quarters



Shock absorbing joints (hips, knees and ankles)

THE RIDER'S EFFECT ON BALANCE:

A combined centre of gravity of horse and rider is approximately 10% higher than that of the horse alone, but on the same vertical line, so that the distribution of the load between front and hind end would not be affected. Subsequently, the light seat and weight distribution through the legs will not affect the balance.

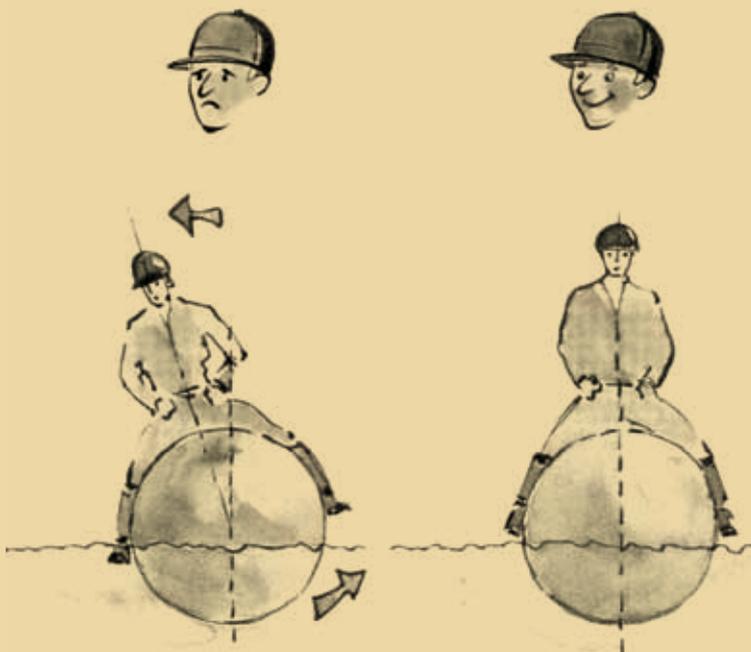
A horse will perform more easily under a rider who can maintain a consistent balance through utilising the aid of his joints (hips, knees, and ankles) where a still load is easier to handle than a mobile one.

The horse will be aware of, and affected by, changes in the rider's weight distribution, which are caused by loss of balance. As for a show jumping rider, your main priority is to find a way to stop your weight moving around and disturbing your horse's natural movement.

For a rider, it is not easy to jump with your weight in the saddle – and that is because you will be unable to stay in harmony with the horse's movement as he jumps. You have to keep your centre of gravity in line with that of the horse; therefore a light seat provides an ideal solution to stay in tune with the horse's motion.

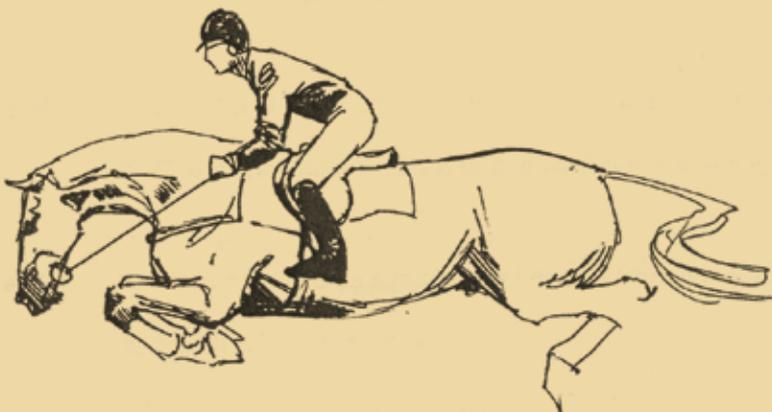
The rider's weight is carried through the legs with some weight dispersed inwardly through the knees, yet still the actual weight is taken on the saddle through the stirrups. As a result, all the horse feels is the rider's weight just behind his withers acting in the same vertical line. 

About the author: Khaled Assem is a certified Level 2 FEI trainer. He has been training for 15 years, competing internationally for 10 years and locally for 25 years.



Implications of an inverted vertical line

Correct vertical line leading to good balance



Ideal position showing the centre line over the fence