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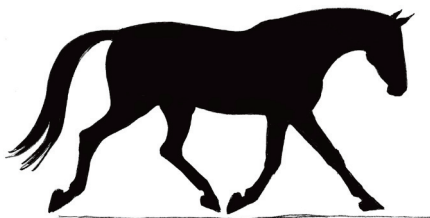


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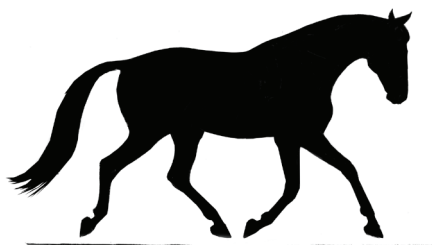
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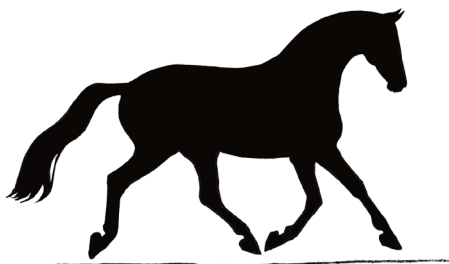
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9.1 A By nature, the horse is in a downhill frame with most of his weight on the forehand. He starts his warm-up in this frame that he was born in. This balance isn't wrong, but the rider can improve it.



9.1 B As the horse warms up, the rider's shaping aids help him come to better balance in a more horizontal frame. He carries about 50 percent of his weight with the forehand and 50 percent with the hindquarters.



9.1 C In collection, the horse develops an uphill frame as he starts to take significant weight with the hindquarters. The forehand is visibly light and free.

Downhill Balance

When you first get on your horse, he's on the forehand (fig. 9.1 A). That means he has more than 50 percent of his weight on the shoulders. This balance isn't wrong: Horses are born on the forehand because the neck and head are attached to the front of an otherwise table-like structure.

This is his natural balance, and he starts every ride like this, where he's comfortable—as he is in the field, in his stall, or on cross-ties. If he's like 99 percent of horses, he's a bit crooked as well as being on the forehand. This on-the-forehand, crooked situation isn't a problem as long as you understand it and know the path to a better balance. As he develops over time, he spends less time in this frame because he understands the aids that improve his balance, and he becomes physically adept at carrying himself straighter and in a better balance. Normally, the horse's on-the-forehand balance improves quickly. During warm-up, the horse develops a physical connection with his rider in shoulder-fore. He becomes straighter and as a result, his weight is automatically distributed so he is in a horizontal frame.

Horizontal Balance

When your horse is horizontally balanced, he has approximately 50 percent of his weight on the front end and 50 percent on the hind end (fig. 9.1 B). It feels like he's carrying the same amount of weight on all four feet. Some of the well-bred horses of today are already close to this balance when they are born. The mature, well-schooled, and well-muscled horse also may start out in a horizontal balance. In the 50/50 balance, the horse no longer needs his neck to keep his balance, so it—along with the rest of his spine—can be relaxed and free. This is your first goal for all horses.

Uphill Balance

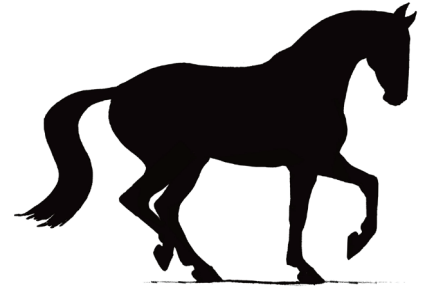
The end goal for dressage horses and jumpers is to develop an uphill balance in which the horse carries more weight with his hind end than with the front end—in a state of collection (fig. 9.1 C). Competitive dressage horses start elementary collection at Second Level. Consistent collection is a long-term

goal. The average horse can't sustain a collected balance for long without a few years of bodybuilding. Further degrees of collection at the higher levels take even more bodybuilding.

High Collection

The highly trained horse demonstrates high collection by carrying an enormous amount of weight with the hindquarters when he is jumping high fences or doing the highly collected dressage movements—piaffe, passage, and pirouette (fig. 9.1 D). In the pirouette, the horse briefly carries 100 percent of his weight—and the rider's weight—on one hind leg. He only spends short periods of time in this high collection, no matter how strong or well-trained he is.

Assess your horse's longitudinal balance with Exercise 4 on page 115.



9.1 D In high collection, the equine athlete can carry a great deal of weight on the hindquarters for short periods of time. This includes the jumper at a high fence and the dressage horse in piaffe, passage, and pirouette.

Elastic Frames

The rider develops her horse's balance by suppling him. When she can create and be a part of the recycled, rhythmic energy, her aids ride on the energy that goes from the hind legs to the bit and back to the hind legs. Then the horse will follow the rider's hand to whatever frame she desires. The rider's seat and leg send energy to the hand at whatever length of stride and height of neck she desires, and then the horse pushes away from the bit and the energy is recycled back to the hindquarters.

Working Frame

The horse's working frame reflects his natural balance and conformation. It's the frame in which he does the working trot and working canter (fig. 9.2). In this frame, he can most easily be "connected" from back to front because it's the same as, or slightly shorter than, his frame in nature—

9.2 The Working Trot. Horses develop a connection with the rider in the working gaits as you see here. Infanta reaches through her neck for the bit as her hind leg "tracks up" or steps to the place where her forefoot is leaving the ground. Her frame is slightly shorter than it is naturally, for instance, when she is standing in her stall or on the cross-ties, so that she can be elastic and athletic. The other paces are all developed from the working paces.





when in the pasture, the stall, or the aisle. When the frame is very slightly shorter than it is naturally, it allows the horse to be elastic and athletic. His topline “bridges” like a strung bow, and his energy can be recycled with half-halts, so his gaits become self-perpetuating and develop into a 50/50 balance. The horse is in complete comfort in this working frame. Unless the horse has a fleshy crest, the poll is the highest point of his topline.

Lengthened Frame

The horse covers more ground with longer strides while keeping the same rhythm and tempo (speed of the rhythm). The rhythm doesn't quicken as it is usually inclined to do; it stays clocklike (fig. 9.3). The frame lengthens as the stride does, and the energy circles through horse and rider with the aids riding on longer, not faster, waves of

9.3 The Lengthened Stride. The horse reaches throughout his topline, lengthening both the stride and the frame. The lengthened stride is first required at First Level and is a reflection of the horse's impulsion.

energy. Lengthenings are first required in First Level to test the horse's impulsion. They develop the horse's ability to reach for the bit, so it's critical that he is on, or in front of, the vertical with his poll the highest point.

Collected Frame

This is first required at Second Level where we find collected trot and collected canter (figs. 9.4 A & B). It is shorter than the working frame because the joints of the hindquarters bend and carry more weight (engage). As the joints of the hind legs bend, the

9.4 A & B (A) The Collected Trot. In collection, the horse retains the rhythm, activity, and energy of the working gait, but he shifts more weight to the hindquarters and the hind legs bend a bit more; the center of gravity shifts back. As a result, the horse takes higher, bouncier strides and he is freer in front. Mica and Infanta demonstrate this very well.

(B) The Collected Canter. The effect of Mica's half-halts is clear. Infanta's hindquarters step under the center of gravity and the forehand is light and free. The horse is clearly in an uphill, collected balance.



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9.5 The Medium Trot. In the medium gaits, the horse retains the lift of collection and the reach of the lengthened stride. The result is a lofty, ground-covering stride and a longer frame.

croup lowers, and the front end lifts and lightens. The steps are lofty and energetic. The horse's neck falls down from the withers but is actually high because the shoulders are high. The horse's neck doesn't lift without his shoulders lifting. The horse lifts and carries the rider with expression. The waves of energy recycle in a shorter, higher circle, and the aids ride on the collected circle of energy. Unless the horse has a fleshy crest, the poll is the highest point.

Medium Frame

This frame combines lengthening *and* lifting (fig. 9.5). Medium paces are first required at Second Level. The horse retains his ability to thrust as he does in lengthenings, and he couples it with increased ability to lift his body as he does in collection. The waves of energy are both longer and loftier. The horse is more expressive than in the working frame. The energy continues to recycle in the same way. Unless the horse has a fleshy crest, the poll is the highest point.

9.6 The Extended Canter. In the extended gaits, the collected horse reaches to his maximum ability. We see the result in Infanta's uphill posture as she gives Mica the most ground coverage possible.



Extended Frame

This frame is the one in which the horse covers as much ground as possible (fig. 9.6). Think of a speedboat taking off. The horse's nose should reach to the place where the front foot is destined to land. The waves of energy are maximized. The poll is the highest point.

Stretching Frame

This refers to the frame in which the horse gradually “chews the reins” from the rider's hands and follows the bit by reaching in a forward-downward direction (fig. 9.7). The

9.7 The Stretch. The horse should always be willing and able to follow the contact when the rider gives the reins forward. Infanta reaches forward and downward toward the bit and lifts her back. In this photo you can see the bulging of the topline muscles both in front of and behind the saddle. Mica feels it under the saddle, too. It feels good.

“chewing” (as opposed to distressed “chomping”) is a sign of relaxation and acceptance of the bit. Stretching encourages relaxation of the entire topline. The neck “falls down” from the withers as it does in nature. This posture directly causes the back to lift, giving the topline a round, swinging action. It encourages reaching toward the contact through the base of the neck and the entire topline. Stretching is appropriate in the beginning and the end of the ride as well as during breaks throughout the ride. The poll is lower, and it's most important that the neck is evenly arched.

Sometimes riders make the mistake of allowing the stretching horse to be too long, disconnected, and on the forehand. The stretching frame—with connection—is used frequently for a high-headed horse that isn't naturally inclined to use his back well and might be difficult to connect. As the horse's neck is lowered and is carried by the upper muscles of the neck, it pulls the horse's back up (see fig. 19.2, p. 202).

Assess your horse's frame and self-carriage by doing Exercises 1 through 3 (pp. 113–115). As you make transitions and teach your horse how to use his body in different frames and balances, you'll benefit from being aware of timing and how to develop impulsion without speed. I cover this subject in the next chapter (p. 117).



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