

The Importance of Posting Diagonals

Yes, it matters which one you're on! Here's why.

Text and photographs by Cindy Sydnor

Most equestrians who ride in English tack learn their posting (aka rising) trot diagonals in the first few lessons. I've seen children become amazingly proficient as young as four to six years of age. Very few riders, however, are taught why one posts on a certain diagonal. I suspect that few instructors know why, either, because they were once these very young riders who learned simply to look at the horse's outside shoulder and stand up when it moves forward.

There is a reason, though, and in this article I'll share it with you. I'll start by outlining the mechanics of the horse and rider in the rising trot. Next, I'll explain when to change diagonals and why. Finally, I'll give you some fun exercises to help you learn how to pick up the correct diagonal and confirm your skill in becoming a master at it.

Biomechanics of Rising Trot

As he moves, your horse's inside hind leg works slightly harder than his out-

side hind. When you are traveling on the right rein (clockwise), for example, his right hind supports slightly more weight and therefore has to thrust slightly harder than his left hind. This is especially true if he is ridden correctly on straight and bent lines and travels in "first position," with his inside hind tracking between the paths of his two front feet. (If he is allowed to travel in a "crooked" way—with his haunches slightly to the inside—then he is usually unbalanced and somewhat on the forehand.)

When you rise or post to the trot, your horse feels your weight in the "down" moment when you sit in the saddle. In the "up" moment, the pressure on his back is significantly reduced. When you sit in the saddle, you can influence your horse's carrying and thrusting powers—the two powers of the hind legs. When your seat is out of the saddle, you are less able to influence him.

You may be wondering why, if the rider's influence is reduced in the rising trot, dressage riders don't just sit the trot all the time. There are two main reasons: First, with young horses, whose backs are not yet conditioned to carry a rider's weight, sitting the trot would likely make the horse sore in the back, which could lead to training problems. (In German, the rising trot is referred to as *Leichtreiten*, which means "riding lightly.") Second, the rising trot is preferred for warming up a horse of any age because it is often more conducive to getting the horse's back to "swing." Sitting the trot immediately may cause the horse to stiffen or even hollow his back.

Rising Trot as Training Tool

The correct way to ride rising trot is to sit when the horse's inside hind leg lands and pushes off into the next stride. With this timing, you can help influence this important moment, either by either driving slightly with your seat and leg or by half-halting with your seat and outside rein to slow a rushed tempo. Your added weight and the influence of your seat in the saddle



ALL RISE: The "up" moment of the posting (rising) trot. The rider's seat leaves the saddle as the horse's outside foreleg and inside hind leg leave the ground. As the inside hind leg lands, the rider will sit for the early carrying phase of that limb. Katherine Tackett rides Fuerst Blush, owned by Ashley Powell Nosek, Greensboro, NC.




SIT TO INFLUENCE: 1) Katherine in the sitting moment of the posting trot, when she can use her seat and driving aids to influence the thrust of Fuerst Blush's inside hind leg. 2) Midway through the thrusting phase, the mare is responding to the driving aids by pushing off more strongly with her inside hind. 3) The maximum thrusting phase of the inside hind leg, just before the opposite hind leg pushes off and Katherine rises to the trot.

helps to gymnasticize your horse's inside hind leg by promoting muscular development and engagement. That's why correct posting is important in the training of young horses and the maintenance of mature horses. It is a basic part of the timing of the aids.

There is one instance when posting on the "wrong" diagonal (the outside hind) is useful and correct: in teaching a very green horse to make a transition from trot to canter. By sitting on the outside hind leg (posting on the wrong

diagonal), the rider can influence the horse's outside hind leg when asking for the canter transition. Because the outside hind leg initiates the canter transition, this technique often helps the green horse to find the coordination he needs to make the transition into the first stride of the canter, instead of speeding up the trot and rushing into the canter. This technique also helps horses that have difficulty taking a particular lead and tend to canter on the wrong lead in one direction. ➔



FALL CLASSIC SALE




OCTOBER 7-8TH 2017


WESTERNER PARK RED DEER, AB

Visit us online August 10th to see our great selection!


This prestigious event will host bloodlines respected the world over. A great chance to buy well raised stock and not pay international shipping.

Hunters - Jumpers - Dressage
Top Bloodlines - Ready to go!



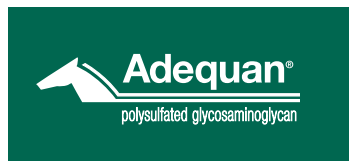
CANADIAN



WARMBLOOD

www.fallclassicsale.com

Thank You for Supporting USDF



The Official Joint Therapy Sponsor of USDF

Title Sponsor
Adequan®/USDF FEI-Level Trainers Conference
Annual Convention and Awards

Presenting Sponsor
US Dressage Finals

800-458-0163
www.adequan.com



Official Equine Insurance Provider of USDF

Title Sponsor
Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional Dressage Championships

Supporting Sponsor
US Dressage Finals



678-638-3000
boehringer-ingelheim.com



800-942-4258
dietrich-insurance.com



800-303-7849
www.dressageextensions.com



402-434-8585
www.dressagefoundation.org



800-553-2400
www.platinumperformance.com



800-611-6109
www.dressagearena.net



SMARTPAK

800-461-8898
www.smartpakequine.com

Choosing and Changing Posting Diagonals

“Fix your diagonal” is not terribly helpful in teaching a rider to recognize correct diagonals. Most riders will change the diagonal when told, but they didn’t see or feel it themselves. It would be better to say, “Change the hind leg,” which is a translation of the German *Fuss wechseln*. Americans are taught to check posting diagonals by looking at the horse’s outside shoulder, but doing so tells the rider nothing about the horse’s hind legs.

That said, you can check your diagonal by observing the forward movement of your horse’s outside shoulder and coordinating that moment with rising. Try to use your peripheral vision instead of looking down. With practice, this will become easy. Even better, try to feel when your horse’s inside hind is landing, and sit in that moment. (I’ll give you exercises to help with this on page 20.)

When you change directions, you’ll want to change diagonals to stay in sync with your horse’s new inside hind leg. To change diagonals, sit for two strides instead of just one; then resume the regular one-two, up-down posting rhythm. You’ll also change diagonals as you ride a diagonal line (e.g., M-X-K), a serpentine, or a loop.

Here’s when to change diagonals during these figures: On a diagonal line such as M-X-K in working trot, change diagonals at X—but in a trot lengthen-

Cindy’s Tip: “Inside” vs. “Outside”

In dressage, “inside” and “outside” are always relative to the bend through the length of the horse’s body, not to the direction you are riding in the arena.

If you are aware of where “inside” and “outside” are on your horse at any given moment, you will always know which posting diagonal to be on.

ing, wait until the end of the diagonal line to change posting diagonals.

In riding a serpentine, change diagonals just before you cross the center line—one or two strides before you change the bend in your horse. This timing prepares him for a more supple change of bend and increased engagement of the new inside hind leg.

It's optional to change diagonals while riding a loop, but I think it is good to do so because the loop is a lateral suppling exercise, similar to a stretched-out serpentine. In a loop, change diagonals each time you cross the quarter line of the arena.

Posting-Trot Exercises

Leg-yield. A good example of the benefit of riding on the correct hind leg or diagonal is in the exercise of leg-yielding. In leg-yield, the horse moves forward and sideways away from the rider's inside leg, without bend but with slight inside flexion of the poll.

As your horse leg-yields, his inside hind leg crosses in front of his outside



Silver Whinnys® maintain a hygienic environment around the legs useful for reducing dirt, debris and bio-burden near any pre-existing sores and wounds.

"We have become big believers in Silver Whinnys®. We use them in our clinic for cases needing pressure evenly applied to legs, difficult dermatitis issues, wounds, and hard to bandage areas especially knees and hocks. They are easy to apply and are a great tool for any owner or veterinarian to have in their first aid kit." Rebecca Rodvold DVM

"This is a fantastic product!! They have helped us save horse's lives." Erica Lacher, DVM

Sox For Horses!
www.soxforhorses.com 850-907-5724

*"Your saddle should...
welcome you, not fight you"*

*"Schleese's fit philosophy
made the difference for me."*

At Schleese our infinitely adjustable saddles are designed for the female physiology.

Our mission is to ensure both horse and rider are properly protected.

Anne Gribbons
5* FEI Judge, Past USEF Coach,
Olympic Caliber Trainer



Fit is Everything.

saddlesforwomen.com | info@schleese.com | 800.225.2242    

hind leg and moves under his center of gravity. As you rise to the trot during this movement, you sit when the crossing hind leg contacts the ground. In this moment, you can use forward-sideways driving aids to stimulate the crossing hind leg to reach further and push harder. This is a good overall strengthening exercise, especially for the crossing hind leg. Ride leg-yield in both directions to help develop your horse evenly.

A more advanced leg-yield exer-

cise is to leg-yield away from the track for a few strides and then leg-yield in the opposite direction, back to the track. If you're on the right rein, you'd leg-yield right away from your left (inside) leg. After a few strides, stop riding leg-yield and ride straight forward, parallel to the track, for a few feet before leg-yielding left (away from your right leg) back to the track. Change your posting diagonal just before each change of leg-yield direction.

Counting strides. Here's my

favorite exercise to check that I'm posting on the correct diagonal. Start in rising trot on a 20-meter circle or on the track. You'll sit the trot for an uneven number of strides and then resume rising, in this pattern: Sit three, post three; sit five, post five; sit seven, post seven; sit nine, post nine. Then go back down, nine-seven-five-three. Each time you resume posting, check to see if you are on the correct diagonal. Repeat on the opposite rein. Children master this exercise with just a little practice. Adults can do it, too!

Voice-aided timing. It's common for novice riders to post on the same diagonal on both reins. Learn the difference with this exercise. Start by riding a transition from walk to working trot sitting. Remain sitting as you look at your horse's outside shoulder, and say "up" out loud every time you see his outside shoulder going forward. Continue to say "up" as you prepare to rise in rhythm with your voice. Take your time. Sit for as long as it takes until you can literally tell yourself when to rise. And if at first you don't succeed, try, try again! You can master this.

Develop feel. Another fun exercise is to learn to feel when the horse's outside shoulder is going forward without having to look at it. Start in working trot sitting. Look ahead at your horse's ears or even higher, at the tree line or the roof line of the indoor arena—no glancing down!—and concentrate on

Where Do You And Your Horse Rank?

You could receive an award!

Don't Miss These Important Year-end Award Deadlines!

- **September 30, 2017**
 - Submission deadline for: birthdates for vintage cup; adult amateur and junior/young rider awards
 - Declaration deadline for vintage cup and verifying adult amateur status
 - Membership deadline for USDF Breeder of the Year eligibility
- **October 15, 2017**
 - All corrections must be reported to USDF by 5:00 p.m. ET
- **October 27, 2017**
 - Photo submission deadline (first place recipients only) for inclusion in the yearbook issue of *USDF Connection*
- **November 3, 2017**
 - If planning to receive your award at the Salute Gala & Annual Awards Banquet purchase your banquet ticket online and provide USDF award recipient information

Learn more about the year-end award requirements in the *USDF Member Guide*.

Check your scores at USDFScores.com

Visit usdf.org/awards/preliminary to find out where you and your horse are ranked.



COMING NEXT MONTH

- **“Comfort” bridles: Does your horse need one?**
- **NAJYRC dressage coverage**
- **Dr. Hilary Clayton: Biomechanics of the horse's neck**
- **Meet the USDF Executive Board candidates**

feeling the left-right-left-right movements of his shoulders. When you are sure you can feel his outside shoulder going forward, rise into posting.

The Ambidextrous Horse and Rider

Horses that have been ridden on only one diagonal don't like it when a rider changes to the "other" diagonal. They often learn the trick of taking a short, quick step to get the rider to change to the diagonal they have come to prefer. Persevere in riding such horses on the correct diagonal to strengthen the weaker hind leg, which is the root of the problem. And that's why it makes a difference in your horse's muscular development, and ultimately in the development of his gaits, to ride rising trot on the correct diagonal.

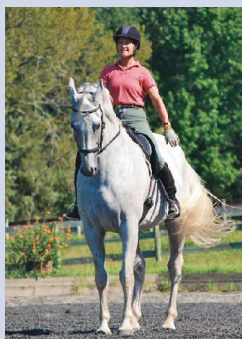
Correct posting is important. Luckily, there are only two diagonals! ▲

Meet the Expert

Cindy Sydnor was an examiner in the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program

for more than 20 years and retired in 2013. She was a US Equestrian "R" dressage judge for more

than 30 years. After riding and training in the US, Germany, Austria, and Brazil, she established her own dressage training facility on her husband's cattle ranch, Braeburn Farm, in Snow Camp, NC. She has taught and trained numerous riders and horses at all levels. Learn more at braeburnfarms.com.



COURTESY OF CINDY SYDNOR

RAMM

The Safer • Stronger • Smarter Choice



the strength you need

RAMM Flex Fence® is a safer & stronger alternative to traditional board fence. When tensioned, the 12.5 gauge high tensile wires contained in each rail will dissipate the force of impact along the entire stretch of continuous fence, allowing it to "flex" 6"- 8" with a break strength of up to 4,200 lbs.



the quality you want

RAMM Stalls are designed for horse people, by horse people. From the door latches to the track system and the finish options to the ease of installation, we carefully consider each aspect of our stalls to ensure that they function safer and easier for you and your horse.

800.434.8445 | rammfence.com

Get your T.I.P. number and show your Thoroughbred to win T.I.P. awards at dressage shows in the U.S. and Canada!

Thoroughbred awards at Great American Insurance Group / USDF Regional Dressage Championships in Regions 1, 4, 5, and 8.

Find shows in your area at tjctip.com

Show off your Thoroughbred at facebook.com/tjctip





THE JOCKEY CLUB
1894

Thoroughbred Incentive Program