

# WESTERN DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION®

OF AMERICA

## WESTERN DRESSAGE GLOSSARY

### GAITS

Any of the rhythms or footfalls of the horse. Gaits demonstrated in Western Dressage include: walk, jog, and lope. Freedom and regularity should be maintained in all three gaits.

### **GAITS versus PACES**

The three **gaits** are walk, jog and lope. The **paces** are the variations of these three gaits (free, working, lengthened, collected).

1 step equals one footfall, not one stride.

### **WALK**

#### Working Walk:

Four-beat, active, energetic walk with resolutely forward-reaching steps and confident stretch to the bit. Head and neck should swing naturally as a result of a relaxed back and free shoulders. The nose must be in front of the vertical. The hind feet should touch the ground into or beyond the prints of the forefeet.

#### Free Walk:

A relaxed walk with unconstrained, forward reaching steps where hind feet touch the ground clearly in front of the footprints of the forefeet. The horse must be relaxed and be allowed complete freedom to lower his head and neck to stretch forward and down and out. The length of stride, rhythm, the relaxation and swing through his back are of great importance.

#### Collected Walk:

The horse, remaining “on the bit”, moves resolutely forward with his neck raised 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 flexion of the joints. The gait should remain marching and vigorous, the feet being placed in regular sequence. The steps cover less ground and are higher than at the Working walk, because all the joints bend more markedly. The Collected walk is shorter than the Working walk, and shows greater activity.

## JOG

### Working Jog:

An energetic, regular, two-beat jog; the horse must go forward with even and elastic steps. The back must be relaxed and the shoulders free, while there is an obvious push from the hindquarters. The hind legs step actively up under the horse. The horse must show proper balance and maintain light contact with the bit. The horse's nose must be on or slightly in front of the vertical. In the Introductory and Basics tests, the Working jog may be ridden either posting or sitting. In more advanced tests, the Working jog should be ridden seated.

### Lengthening of Stride:

This is a variation of the Working jog; the horse covers more ground while maintain the same tempo as in the Working jog. Speeding up is a fault. Lengthening of stride may be ridden either posting or sitting.

### Free Jog:

This is a pace of moderate lengthening of stride and frame compared to the Working jog. Without hurrying, the horse goes forward with clearly lengthened steps, with impulsion from the hindquarters and uphill balance. The rider allows the horse to carry the head a little more in front of the vertical than at the Collected and the Working jog. The horse's neck is "out", down and forward, with the nose slightly in front of the vertical, with a loose rein and the poll at approximately the same height as the wither (the neck is level). The steps should be even, and the whole movement balanced and unconstrained. The Free jog may be ridden posting or sitting.

### Collected Jog:

The horse, remaining "on the bit", moves forward with the neck raised and arched and showing clear self-carriage. The head approaches the vertical position and a light contact is maintained with the mouth. The hocks are well-engaged and flexed and must maintain an energetic impulsion, enabling the shoulders to move more freely. Although the horse's steps are shorter than in the other jogs, elasticity and cadence are not lessened. The Collected jog must be ridden seated.

*\* The gaited horse will perform a saddle gait in place of the jog. (More information follows under "IMPORTANT NOTES".)*

## LOPE

Three equal, regular beats with time of suspension after the third beat. One stride equals 3 beats, or three footfalls. Can be on right or left lead. Footfall sequence in right lead is: Left hind, right hind and left fore together, right fore, then suspension.

Footfall sequence in left lead: Right hind, left hind and right fore together, left fore, then suspension.

**LOPE** has typically slower tempo than a canter and must keep the three beat rhythm or the regularity is lost.

Correct lope must be balanced, rhythmic, 3 beat with a clear time of suspension, straight, adjustable and supple, showing willingness to move forward in self-carriage with engaged hindquarters.

**FAULTS:** Loss of three beat rhythm, crookedness, tight and tense back with short stiff neck; horse on forehand and/or leaning on the bit, nose consistently behind the vertical, changing tempo.

Working Lope:

While maintaining the three beat cadence, the horse must go forward with even and elastic steps. The back must be relaxed and the shoulders free; there is an obvious push from the hindquarters and the hind legs step actively up under the horse. The horse must maintain light contact with the bit and his nose must be in front of the vertical.

Lengthening of Stride:

This is a variation of the Working lope; the horse covers more ground while maintaining the same tempo as in the Working lope. Speeding up is a fault.

Collected Lope:

The horse, remaining “on the bit”, moves forward with the neck raised and arched. The hocks are well-engaged and maintain an energetic impulsion, enabling the shoulders to move more freely, demonstrating self-carriage and an uphill tendency. The horse’s strides are shorter than in the other lopes, without losing elasticity and cadence.

Free Lope:

Without hurrying, the horse goes forward with clearly lengthened strides and impulsion from the hindquarters. While maintaining a light contact, the rider allows the horse to carry the head a little more in front of the vertical than in the collected and working lope, and at the same time, allows the horse to lower the head and neck slightly. The horse's neck is "out" with the nose slightly in front of the vertical, with a light contact and the poll at approximately the same height as the wither (the neck is level). The strides should be balanced and unconstrained.

Counter Lope:

The counter lope is a balancing and straightening movement. The horse appears to be cantering on the incorrect lead to the direction of travel. The horse will be positioned (flexed) to the outside; slightly to opposite direction of travel. The horse lopes in a correct sequence to the left on the right lead; the horse lopes to the right in a correct sequence on the left lead.

## **TERMS**

### **“ABOVE THE BIT”**

The horse is avoiding contact with the bit by raising his head/muzzle forward/upward; usually due to avoiding the aids of the rider and lacks balance throughout the horse's body. When he is above the bit he practically inverts at the poll.

### **ADJUSTABILITY**

The ability to shorten or lengthen the stride and the topline of the horse within a gait and/or pace without changing the tempo. An athletic horse shows this capacity naturally, and his ability to do so is further developed by correct training.

### **“BEHIND THE BIT”**

Avoiding contact with the bit, but not necessarily being behind the vertical.

### **“BEHIND THE VERTICAL”**

The frontal plane of the horse's head is behind the vertical line and he is actually looking at the ground.

### **CADENCE**

A definite accentuation of the rhythm along with elasticity and springy impulsion.

### **CHANGE OF REIN**

A change of direction within the enclosure in which the horse/rider are travelling. The rein facing the center of this enclosure is called the "inside rein". The one to the outside of the enclosure is therefore the "outside rein".

### **COLLECTION**

Collection is not to be confused with "headset", nor with slower or shorter strides. Collected paces have relatively shorter steps and more uphill balance, while the frame is shorter and the neck is stretched and arched upward. The horse should reach calmly to contact with the bit with the nose nearly at, but never behind, the vertical. At collected trot and canter, the support phase of the hind legs is more pronounced than in the other paces of the gait.

Collection is achieved by increased weight-bearing of the horse's haunches, thereby lowering the croup and lightening the forehand to allow the shoulders more freedom. The horse stride becomes markedly shorter but gain animation and height.

Many riders erroneously shorten the horse's strides by pulling on the reins, believing that shorter and slower steps = collection. Collection is NOT produced by such incorrect aids.

Instead, using seat and leg aids, riding the horse briefly into a slightly firmer contact, will cause the horse to round and lower his croup and step in more deeply under himself from behind.

### **“CORRECT STEPPING THROUGH” or “STEPPING THROUGH FROM BEHIND”**

The hind leg swings forward from a bent hip and stifle, resulting in a connection of the push from the hind leg bringing his hind feet closer to the mid-point of his belly (as seen from the side), up through a relaxed and supple back and neck, to a soft mouth that is receptive to the rider's hand. It is an absolute opposite from “pushing out behind”.

### **ELASTICITY**

The smooth stretch and contraction of muscles that give the steps spring and bounce, achieved by a horse moving with suppleness.

### **ENERGY**

The willingness of the horse to give over to the rider the impulsion necessary to do a task.

### **ENGAGEMENT**

The ability of the horse to place the hind legs under the body to lighten the forehand. This is seen by the power of the hocks pushing the horse forward.

Lack of Engagement is totally opposite. The horse appears to be life-less.

### **HALF HALT or SHORTENING OF FRAME**

A method of bringing the horse to a higher degree of balance and mental attention. The half-halt can be performed in many different ways that may include the use of legs, seat and hands.

### **IMPULSION**

Desire to move forward. Relaxation and swing of the back; elasticity of the steps, correct stepping through and under from behind. Impulsion describes the willingness of the horse to allow its forward energy to be used and shaped by the rider.

Impulsion has a phase of suspension, as in the jog and lope, and does therefore not apply to the walk.

## **LIGHTNESS**

Lightness can either address:  
the lightness of the horse's forehand or  
his lightness as far as the contact with the bit is concerned.

## **“ON THE BIT”**

The horse is correctly connected from BACK TO FRONT and willingly accepting contact with the bit. In fact, at that time he should accept rider's seat, weight and leg aids as well.

## **PIVOT**

In a pivot, one of the legs, front or hind, remains on the ground while the opposite leg steps around it. WDAA also allows in turns on the forehand, haunches-in or pirouettes: the two legs around which the turn is performed must be mobile in order to maintain the rhythm of the walk or lope. Both methods are to be judged equally.

## **RHYTHM**

The timing of the footfalls in a particular gait e.g. four-beat, three-beat, two-beat. Do not confuse Rhythm with Tempo.

## **STRAIGHTNESS**

The horse should always be straight on straight lines and correctly and evenly bent from poll to tail on curved lines.

## **SUBMISSION**

Harmony between horse and rider = working as a TEAM with respect and mutual understanding.

Attention and confidence; ease of movements and acceptance of the bridle while always staying up in the poll and keeping the nose in front of the vertical.

Expectation of the degree of lightness increases as the horse is advanced in his training.

## **TEMPO**

Rate of repetition of the footfalls. The tempo best for gymnastic development is individual to the horse.

## **THROUGHNESS**

The horse is said to be "through" when the rider's aids can connect the horse's back to his front, and vice versa, without any blocking resistance.

## **ZIG-ZAG**

A movement containing more than two half-passes with changes of direction.

## **IMPORTANT NOTES**

### **MANY PEOPLE CONFUSE "TEMPO" WITH "RHYTHM" AND/OR**

**"ADJUSTABILITY" OF THE GAIT:** collection or extension of a gait must be accomplished with no change in the tempo of the footfalls. The tempo must remain unchanged during all paces of the gait.

In other words, the horse must not rush when asked to extend, nor slow his tempo when asked to collect. The ability of a rider to show adjustability of the gaits while maintaining a steady tempo is a major proof of his/her skill. It shows the difference between an accomplished rider and one who is still lacking in education.

**"GAITED" horses** have different rhythm of their footfalls, resulting in different gaits. The gaited horse will perform a saddle gait in place of the jog. The saddle gait is a 4 beat lateral or diagonal gait, timely and evenly performed. The tempo, rhythm and foot falls of the gait they choose to show must not change throughout the test. This true four beat gait the horse performs, should be able to be ridden in a working, lengthened, free and collected manner as the Western Dressage test calls for.

**Lack of regularity** at walk, jog or lope is a fault that must be penalized in a dressage horse. With correct training, however, the gaits can become amplified and more expressive. As the horse develops physically, he gains strength and can carry more weight behind; thus the forehand becomes lighter and the shoulders have more freedom, reach and mobility. Much of a horse's training is devoted to developing relaxation, so as to preserve the purity of the gaits.

Riding with the feet way out in front of the seat results in what is called a "chair seat", which limits the rider's ability to influence the horse's bend. A rider must always maintain a proper position and alignment in order to connect the horse correctly from back to front and to encourage him to carry more weight behind.

The timing of the aids for transitions takes "feel" from the rider. Developing "feel" takes hours in the saddle, and experience, reading and studying are essential first steps to understanding, but there is no substitute for logging in hours on the horse!

Your saddle is the interface between you and your horse. It is an essential tool and you should take great pains to make sure it is comfortable for both of you. Poorly or ill-fitting saddles are often the root cause of many training problems. The same thing goes for the bit. A strong bit is often a tacit admission either of incompetence (inadequate seat and leg aids) or of laziness.