

THE STANCE
JULIE ULRICH

One of the most valued qualities in a sport horse is his natural balance. Volumes have been written about how to select a young horse with apparent balance, the conformation that lends itself to good balance, and how not to spoil the balance during the education of the horse.

Still, there is more to be said.

A horse can be balanced when he is standing to be judged for conformation, but be Unbalanced once he is in motion, or once he carries a rider, or once he assumes the speed at which he will perform. The important factor of balance for a horse is his balance IN MOTION, and usually...With a rider.

The horse balances himself with his neck firstly. Of course that is why the contact with the rein too early in the training, which leads to a shortened neck, or a horse which leans on the hand can ruin the natural balance. I believe this premise to be universally accepted and I will not dwell on it.

The horse also can improve his balance by improving his STANCE on the ground. There are examples of this which will clarify how he does that.

1. The horse who does not balance well in transport is easily made calmer by giving him a double or triple space, which enables him to spread his legs apart. Improved Stance.
2. The horse who is learning to put All his weight on his hind legs, ie LEVADE will spread his hind legs apart. Improved Stance.



Gap of the hind legs for the stance

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3. The cutting horse in front of his cow, prepared to go left or right in a hurry spreads his front legs apart. Improved Stance.
4. The horse at the takeoff for a tall jump will put both hind legs on the ground to push hard...but with a wider space between them than usual. Improved Stance.



Kevin Staut and Iliade KDW Z : Iliade has improved her stance in order to produce this effort
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5. The horse in piaffe, but insecure, will sway left and right to improve his stability.
Improved Stance

So there are two types of balance challenges...weight to the front and weight to the back, and equally important, but rarely discussed, ...weight to the left and right.

Walk on a fence, or walk on a very thin line...you will rapidly have a balance challenge. Walk on a broader track and you immediately feel secure and can go back to swinging your arms as you go. Horses which are stiff and inflexible in their chest and hip muscles can have difficulty balancing as they cannot improve their Stance in motion.

At this time it is important to return to the discussion of conformation

which pertains to balance. A very narrow horse was often described

as having both front legs in the same bucket! This type of horse can

have the described difficulty in balance left and right. A very wide shouldered and wide hipped horse, although having a broad stance, IS NOT THE ANSWER. He cannot gallop well and is not fluid enough for

the sport. The ideal conformation lies between these extremes and

the dressage and gymnastic training is the solution to any difficulty.

It is said that one cannot teach balance. This is probably true. It is the simplest solution to buy a well balanced horse. However a horse can have spoiled his natural balance due to poor training...and he can be RE-EDUCATED to find it again. A horse can be a genius in one area and blocked in another.

Correcting a problem, in this second category of balance, is easy and will have immediate impact. It involves lateral work, either leg yielding or shoulder in, but not half pass or traversal. The emphasis must be put upon the action of the outside front leg or the outside hind leg instead of the (habitual)attention given to the inside front and hind. It is the distance between the legs that stretches the muscles and ligaments and which loosens the horse. For example, in shoulder in right, the left shoulder and the left hind are really more important in this aspect than the right shoulder and right hind. The horse must be taught, slowly, kindly, and in the rhythm, to spread his legs apart. If he cannot do this, force is not the answer. Repetition with affection will loosen the frozen mechanism every time.



One of the priority of the lateral work is the action of the exterior legs (shoulders hind legs)

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Once the horse has been worked correctly for even a week or two, he will possess the key to his balance. He will become calmer, his balance will enable him to be more sure.

A balanced horse is a joy to ride. Any rider will remark on a horse who is balanced! A balanced horse is secure on his feet and able to obey easily. This horse is calm and willing BECAUSE of his balance. Volumes have been written. There is always more to say. There is always more to learn.

