

What Is A Gaited Horse?

Dr Gabby Moore, DVM

Gaited horses differ from other horses because they have one or more "intermediate" or four beat gaits. Because with intermediate gaits at least one foot is on the ground at any given time, there is no free fall or suspension to produce a jarring found in a two beat trot. This means that the ride is smooth for the rider and efficient for the horse. This makes gaited horses a better choice for anyone whose age or physical disability makes riding a two beat trot uncomfortable. It also is more efficient for the horse so gaited horses often can go farther, faster than a lot of other horses without exhaustion of either horse or rider. This means that gaited horses are desirable for distance riding of all kinds.

Many gaited horses are multi-gaited and can do one or more of the following: foxtrot, rack, stepping pace and running walk in addition to a flat foot walk and canter. Because of the number of possible gaits, the person new to gaited horses may want to get help with gait recognition. Gaited horses can be more complicated than straight gaited breeds. There is a learning curve, no matter how experienced as a rider you are, when riding gaited breeds. A few gaited horses have only one set intermediate gait. These are the easiest for a person new to gaited horses to ride. You may need help to learn to recognize that gait and "hold" the gait. Even horses set solidly in a running walk or foxtrot may hard trot or pace if not ridden properly. It is not unusual for us to hear from someone that the horse they bought in the past gaited fine when first purchased but now has a hard trot or pace. Gaited horses are a little like learning to drive an 18 wheel rig with a lot of gears when you have been used to automatic transmission in the family car. Having a horse "set in his gaits" means that the horse will do a proper gait when asked for it and hold it. It takes time to set the gaits properly and avoid gait problems such as a hard pace. The foxtrot is the only diagonal intermediate gait. The foxtrot gait usually makes a horse more sure footed in rough country than a lateral gait such as a running walk or rack.

Here at Horses & Moore we will help you get acquainted with gaited horses if you are new to them. Just give us a call.