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 | Top of Form**MY NUMBR ONE ASKED QUESTION IN THE LAST TEN YEARS.**  **QUESTION**:  **Why is my gaited horse not smooth to ride?** **ANSWER**:  **“Keeping the Gaited Horse Smooth and Gaiting” is a long answer.** Are you new to gaited horse world?  Do you want to learn more about your gaited horses?  Do you sometimes feel some frustration regarding the middle gaits?  You are not alone.  Just surf the Internet, and you will find as many different opinions on how to ride the gaited horse as there are opinions on global warming.  What’s even more frustrating is the so called professional rider who advocate riding with their feet stuck out in front of the horse’s shoulder leaning back which drives the horse into a stepping pace. Yes this type of seat can give you a short term rush but will eventually result in a lack of connection with the horse’s hindquarters? What happens the horse will eventually drop his back away from you seat bones to get relieve. If you have to constantly lean backwards with feet forward to get your horse to free up his shoulders you have a saddle fit problem. More than likely the tree is too flexible.  On the other end of the scale, you see riders who lean their head and shoulders too far forward causing different flavor of mutated seat that can cause other variations of the trot and pace.  To be fair, all gaited breeds and non-gaited breeds have gaiting problems.  Look at the many books written on the walk, trot and canter and how to improve the working gaits.  Take a look at the racing horse industry on how to improve gaits to get more speed for the race tracks.  The bottom line is gaited horse breeds and non-gaited horse breeds owners all do have one thing in common, they all require some understanding of rider balance.     Now I’m not advocating that you have to be an Olympic rider but you do have to take some responsibility for your balance not only for your horse’s movement but also for your own safety.  The flash and bang of the show world does not set the standard in keeping the “how to” in gaiting.  Interestingly in the gaited horse world a strange rider glitches can occur without thought because our gaited horses are so smooth.  We as riders can get lulled into a false sense of security and forget to ride with our horse’s movement.  The point I’m trying to make is we take the smoothness for granted and forget to grow and learn.  This really comes into play when you first buy a horse that is gaiting properly.  Then over time, the gait becomes rough.  Fortunately for us, the very nature of gaited horse sends us a signal, a warning light, that the gait is not smooth.  Warning lights occur when you are riding your gaited horse that is doing a hard trotting gait or hard pacing gait.  Our gaited warning light is great system for checks and balances that constantly reminds us of a need to improve our balance and riding skills.  Remember a hard bouncing motion up and down in the saddle usually is hard trot.  A rough side-to-side motion in the saddle is usually a pacing gait.  The good news both bouncing type gaits will eventually jar you into improving your balance in the saddle.  So what’s a person to do who is new to the gaited horse?  First and foremost, remember there are no short cuts.  You need to ride your horse with a good attitude and ***keep riding***.  Here are a few tips to get your started. Remember to sit in the saddle with weight over both seat bones.  Keep your heels underneath your hips and sit up straight.  Always use your seat and legs first to create movement.  Then slowly finish the movement with your hands.  Most importantly, you are developing your riding skill.  Now this will take some “time in the saddle” (TIS) on your part.  If you stay true to the course, commit to TIS and keep riding, You will develop a self-discipline that will lead to confidence, competence, consistency, and common sense. First and foremost getting your position of balanced is 75 % of the task of good riding and that means a good manufactured saddle that fits not only the horse but you.  What I see today is what I call the beginner saddle.  This saddle looks good, very expensive but will always put rider on his pockets with his feet stuck on the dashboard. Here is a hidden warning red light that as you grow and learn better riding skills. You will have and additional expense of buying a better quality saddle that fits the horse and you. Save yourself some money and get it right the first time.  Don’t fall into the chair seat trap because of fads and lack of knowledge.  Ask yourself this question? Will my saddle allow me to learn and grow to be a better horseman?  Another important point to remember is to ride your gaited horse slowly.  I spend a lot of time practicing the art of slow.  Just plain old slow riding will do many things to smooth out and keep your horse gaiting.  One of the main benefits of slow riding gives your horse time to separate his feet into four evenly time steps.  Keep this sentence in the back of your mind or the seat of your pants at all times, slow riding will allow you to find the smooth middle gaits.  Ride your horse slowly and do not let your horse default into faster speeds.  You’ll know when this happens you simply get the warning light. Meaning you’re riding to fast with a bounce.  Slow down and ride between 3 to 4 mph and then as you develop some balance add some speed by building a gear box which will be a smooth increase of speed not a red light bounce. It stands to reason with so many different opinions on how to ride the gaited horse; confusion rears its ugly head.  Just keep in mind you can always ask the horse. He is the foremost leading authority on balance riding.  The horse will always want a balanced rider.  One of the main reasons for keeping your feet underneath you is to help activate the hindquarters with leg pressure.   Good hindquarters will ensure good driving push from the hindquarters not a mutated tail-bobbing lick.Our grandfathers would not have liked most of the modern day saddles because of the position the saddle offers (chair seat) is not good for performance or long distance riding. Let me say this without sounding too cute if the west was settled with a beginner saddle the migration would have stopped at the Mississippi river.  The horses’ backs would have been to sore continue on to California.    Now don’t fall into the trap of blaming the horse for all gaiting problems.  The bottom line if we don’t take some responsibility for our balance, gaiting problems will creep into our riding.  When you take responsibility for your weight and balance to support how your horse moves his feet this will solve many gaited problems.  When riding the gaited horse, you make the call to find the smooth easy gait.  Understanding a little balance with your body and slowing the horse around 3-4 mph is a small price to pay for having the world’s greatest trail horses. Just help your horse to help you.  Gary Lane is the author of “Training the Gaited Horse from the Trail to the Rail” and new DVD understanding the middle smooth gaits. For information see [www.windsweptstable.net](http://www.windsweptstable.net) |