



How GYROTONIC® Can Improve Your Ability to Sit the Trot.

If you're like many dressage riders, sitting the trot is difficult and you end up bouncing around in the saddle. You can learn to effectively sit the trot. There are three main points I'll cover in this article to help you to figure out how.

1. Why is sitting the trot so important?

Sitting the trot properly facilitates your ability to be in balance with your horse. It allows your seat to become a part of the horse's back and in effect for you and your horse to become "one being". It allows you to stay in harmony with the dynamics of your horse's movement. It keeps you over his center of gravity, enabling him to carry you more easily. It allows you to help him engage his hind end so that the forehand becomes lighter and the gaits become more expressive. Also importantly, it causes less stress to your body, because the horse becomes a shock absorber for your joints.

The job of a rider is first and foremost not to interfere with the horse's movement. Next it is to have a positive effect on the movement, enabling the horse to carry the rider in a balanced way and to increase the expressiveness of the gaits. Learning to sit the trot will help you achieve these things.

Also, if you can't sit the trot, you'll be stuck at Training Level forever!

2. What is preventing you from sitting the trot?

There are a number of factors that contribute to make sitting the trot difficult so that you end up bouncing in the saddle.

Point 1 – Alignment. There are two main points of alignment the first of which is your ear/shoulder/hip/heel alignment. When being observed from the side, there should be a straight line running from your ear to your shoulder to your hip to your heel, like a plumb line. One common mistake is to lean back moving your shoulders behind this vertical line. If that's the case you are sitting in "chair" seat behind the horse's center of gravity. This position tends to put the horse on his forehand and make your aids ineffective. Another mistake is to clench the horse's sides with your knees. This causes your seat to leave the saddle losing contact with the horse's back and creates tension in the low back and hips, making it virtually impossible to follow the horse's movement. It can also cause tension in yours and the horse's back and hip joints. The other point of alignment is the line from your elbow to the bit. This should be a straight line slightly sloping down from the elbow to the bit. A break in this line occurs when the hands are held too high, or the wrists are cocked up, down in or out. If this line is broken it creates tension in the reins and causes the delicate line of communication with the horse's mouth to be interrupted.

Point 2 – Bouncing. Many riders bounce when attempting to sit the trot. When you bounce you make it more difficult for your horse to use his body effectively causing a loss of balance and a degradation of his gait. You bounce because you get out of sync with the up and down movement of your horse's back. This is because you are staying in the up phase too long. When the horse's back comes up your seat is lifted by it, however when the horse's back starts to descend you are left behind. As the horse's back starts to come up again you're still on the way down and essentially your seat bones and the saddle collide. As this cycle continues with each stride it causes you to bounce.

Point 3 – Core Strength. If your core is strong you'll be able to stay on the vertical over the horse's center and move in sync with him. If you lack core strength you'll find yourself constantly trying to find where center is. You may get thrown to one side of the saddle or get pulled forward by the

reins. You may find yourself leaning back to avoid bouncing or gripping with the knees to stay in balance. When you have core strength you'll find that your seat sinks into the saddle, your legs drape around the horses' barrel, your hips become shock absorbers, your weight drops into your heels from the waist down and stretches up through the crown of your head from the waist up.

Point 4 – Crookedness. Most humans and horses are crooked from birth. As we age we become more crooked from incorrect body mechanics while performing repetitive motions or from injuries or lack of proper muscular development. It's the rider's job to recognize where the horse is crooked and to help make it straighter. This is a difficult enough job, but even more challenging because of our own crookedness. It's important to recognize where you are crooked and attempt to rebalance yourself. Only then will it be possible to help the horse become straighter.

3. How You Can Learn to Effectively Sit the Trot

Step 1 – Alignment. Sit on a hard chair. If you don't have someone to help you tell you when you're aligned, sit sideways next to a mirror. Take your fingers and put them under your bottom to find your seat bones. They're bony protrusions on the bottom of each buttock. Remove your fingers and sit with your weight directly on top of your seat bones. Next align your ears, shoulders and hips so that they're directly on top of each other. Unless you have a saddle to sit on you won't be able to align your heels. If you're like most people your chin will be jutting out to some degree, so pull it in and back slightly. You may have to make adjustments in your spine to find your alignment. When you are aligned, your spine will still have its natural curve, but you will be lined up to the plumb line.

Using a series of spinal exercises, **GYROTONIC®** can help you find your neutral, arched and curled spine. These are the three phases your spine moves through with each trot stride. Because the forearms are held forward of the body while holding the reins it is common for the shoulders to be rounded forward and the sternum to drop. **GYROTONIC®** can help you lift and open the sternum, and bring the shoulders back and wide. It will also increase the range of motion in your spine.

Next let your arms hang along your sides with your palms facing your body and make gentle fists. Keeping your elbows by your sides, bend your them to about a 45 degree angle. Your thumbs should be on top with straight wrists that follow the line of your forearm. That is approximately the position your arms and hands should be in when mounted and holding the reins, to maintain a proper connection to the bit.

Step 2 – Bouncing. The solution is to get "in phase" with your horse by learning to descend as fast as his back does. When you can get down at the same time his feet hit the ground, you'll be right there, ready to come up again with him from the bottom of his stride eliminating your seat bones colliding with the saddle. To do this you must become more supple in your hip joints where the femur (thigh bone) fits into your hip socket. The femur is a straight bone that connects your hip joint to your knee joint. Both joints act like hinges. When you ride your knee remains stable and the hip joint opens and closes. It has a forward/upward (more open position) and a backward/downward (more closed position) motion. To stop bouncing you must be able to open and close your hip joints in sync with the up and down motion of your horses' back. If you find yourself bouncing after a few strides, start to post and observe how your hip joints are open when you are in the standing phase and how they close when you sit back in the saddle. Try to sit the trot again with the same kind of feeling.

In conjunction with a series of spinal exercises, **GYROTONIC®** will facilitate proper alignment of your femur into the hip socket. This will make the hip more supple and you able to follow the horses' movement. It will also increase the range of motion in your hips.

Step 3 – Core Strength. In order to be effective in the saddle you must have core strength. Your spine is the main support for your body and it must be strong and properly aligned to maintain your position. After all you're on a 1200 pound animal that's moving dynamically. There is only one way to obtain more core strength and that's to work on it.

GYROTONIC® builds core strength by engaging the entire body simultaneously through a series of spiraling and circular spinal motions. The exercises involve using your legs and abdominals for support. It also lengthens the muscles, strengthens the ligaments and makes space in the joints.

Doing **GYROTONIC®** can make you very strong, but at the same time very supple.

Step 4 – Crookedness. The road to being straighter starts with becoming aware of where you're crooked. It's good to assess this both off and on the horse. If you can, seek assistance in evaluating this. When you are mounted, ask your riding instructor for an assessment or someone else who has a good eye.

When you are unmounted, **GYROTONIC®** can help make you straighter through a series of specific exercises. Because all exercises focus on balance and are performed on both sides, it becomes very apparent where the restrictions or imbalances are. Make sure to find a knowledgeable certified trainer to help.

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