

Cantering Leads

The canter is a controlled, three-beat gait performed by a horse. It is a natural gait possessed by all horses, faster than most horses' trot but slower than the gallop. A variation of the canter, seen in western riding, is called the lope and is generally quite slow.

The "lead" of a canter refers to the order in which the legs are placed, and is determined by which leg is the last to ground before the suspension phase. If the left hind leg is placed first (beat one), which would then be followed by the right hind and left foreleg (beat two), before the right foreleg (beat three), the horse is said to be on the "Right Lead." If the right hind leg is beat one, then the left foreleg will be the last leg to ground, and the horse will be said to be on the "Left Lead." Therefore, a person on the ground can tell which lead the horse is on by watching the front and rear legs and determining which is the last one to touch the ground, but may also simply watch to see on which side the legs are literally "leading", landing in front of the opposing side.

When the horse is on a lead, the legs on that side (usually the inside front and hind) have greater extension than those on the other side (usually the outside front and hind). Therefore, a horse on the Right Lead will have its right hind (beat two) come slightly further under its body than the left hindleg had when it grounded (beat one), and the right foreleg (beat three) will reach further out from the horse's body than the left foreleg had extended (beat two).

In general, the horse is on the "correct" lead when it matches the direction it is going. So a horse turning to the right should be on the Right Lead, a horse turning to the left should be on the Left Lead. However, just as people find it easier to write with one hand or the other, most horses have a "better side", on which they find it easier to lead at a canter. In limited circumstances, mostly in dressage training, a horse may be deliberately asked to take the lead opposite of the direction it is traveling. In such cases, this type of canter is called a counter-canter.

A variant canter, involving the same sequence of beats but variant footfalls in beats one and two, is often referred to by equestrians as cross-firing, cross-cantering, or disunited canter, among other terms. To the observer, the horse appears to be leading with one leg in front, but the opposite leg behind. It is produced by an improper sequence of footfalls.

The problem with this sequence is in beat two: the grounded hind and foreleg are NOT diagonal pairs, but are on the same side of the horse (in this case, the outside). This means that the horse is balancing on only one side of its body, which is very difficult for the horse, making it hard to keep the animal balanced, rhythmical, and keeping impulsion. A horse that is cross-firing cannot perform to the best of its ability, and can even be dangerous (such as an unbalanced, cross-firing horse who must jump a huge, solid cross-country obstacle). Additionally, it makes for a very uncomfortable, awkward ride, producing a rolling movement often described as riding an eggbeater, which makes it difficult for the rider to perform to the best of his or her abilities.

The most important function of the correct lead is for balance. While they are unimportant on a straight line, they can greatly influence the athletic ability of a horse on turns, especially if the turn is tight or performed at speed. Horses naturally lean in to the direction they are turning. Since they extend their lead-side legs further out, they may use them to balance themselves as they lean into that direction. So, if on the Right Lead while taking a right turn, the right hind will be positioned more under the body, and the right foreleg more in front of the body, to act as a stabilizer as the horse turns.

When on the incorrect lead, the horse is usually left unbalanced. In this case, correct riding can make the difference in the horse's performance. Good riding can keep the legs positioned correctly enough so that the horse is still able to perform the turn. Poor riding will hinder rather than help the horse, and in extreme situations such as a tight turn at speed, the horse may lose its legs footing and fall.

Source: Wikipedia

TRADITIONAL SIZE



Action Stock Horse Foal – Right Lead – Photo by Dianne Teachworth



Alborozo – Left Lead doing a Pirouette - Photo by Caroline Karnatz



Andalusian Stallion – Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Black Beauty – Cross Cantering (Left Lead in the rear legs, Right Lead in the front legs) Photo by Cathy Hagen



Cantering Welsh Pony – Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Cigar – Left Lead Photo by Carol Federici



Cody – Left Lead – Note this model is not doing a true canter. It's kind of like a stutter step - photo by Randa Garrett



Ethereal – Left Lead Photo by Caroline Karnatz



Flash – Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Gem Twist – Left Lead – Note this mold was sculpted as taking the last stride before jumping. He is not doing a true canter - Photo by Gayle Goodling



Haflinger – Left Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouyton



Phar Lap – Right Lead – Photo by Randi Brazil



Roemer – Left Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouton



Roxy – Right Lead – Photo by Susan Hargrove



Ruffian – Left Lead Photo by Elizabeth Hook



Running Stallion – Cross Cantering (Left Lead in the rear, Right Lead in the front)

Photo by Kollean Gouton



Show Jumping Warmblood – Left Lead Photo by Elizabeth Hook.



Smarty Jones – Right Lead – Photo by Esther Goodrich-Puffe

CLASSIC SIZE



AQHA Foal: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



AQHA Mare: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



AQHA Stallion: Left Lead (note mine is showing on the WRONG Lead) – Photo

By Randa Garrett



Andalusian Foal: Right Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouton



Andalusian Stallion: Right Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouton



Arabian Stallion: Left Lead (note this one is showing on the WRONG lead) – Photo by Kollean Gouyton



Black Beauty: Right Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouyton



Ginger: Cross cantering (Right Lead in the rear, Left Lead in the front) – Photo by Kollean Gouyton



Hobo: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Keen: Left Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouton



Might Tango: Several show this model at the canter. He is really walking. – Photo by Malinda Welte



Morgan Foal: Left Lead – Photo by Anne Lyons



Polo Pony: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett Owned by Malinda Welte

PADDOCK PALS/LITTLE BITS



Clydesdale: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Thoroughbred Stallion: Left Lead – Photo by Kollean Gouton

STABLEMATES



Cantering Foal: Cross Cantering (Left Lead in the rear, Right Lead in the front) – Photo by Randa Garrett



Cantering Stock Horse: Cross Cantering (Right Lead in the rear, Left Lead in the front)



Cantering Warmblood: Left Lead – Photo by Randa GARrett



Clydesdale: Right Lead (mine shows on the WRONG lead) – Photo by Randa

Garrett



Endurance (Arabian): Left Lead (mine shows on the WRONG lead) – Photo by

Randa Garrett



Mustang: Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Seabiscuit: Left Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Thoroughbred: Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Warmblood: Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett

MINI WHINNIES



Cantering Morgan Mare: She's really trotting and not cantering – photo by Randa

Garrett



Cantering TWH Gelding: Right Lead – Photo by Randa Garrett



Cantering TB mare: Left Lead – Photo by Malinda Welte



Galloping Mustang Stallion: Cross Cantering (Left Lead in the rear, Right Lead in the front) – Photo by Randa Garrett



Loping Stock Horse: Left Lead (mine shows on the WRONG lead) – Photo by Randa Garrett



Running TB Stallion: Right Lead (could be cross cantering, but it's hard to tell) – Photo by Randa Garrett