



FEEL, TIMING AND BALANCE

Part 3: BALANCE



Feel, timing and balance are all linked to each other, you will struggle to achieve balance without feel and timing. When you watch a young horse or a foal in the pasture at play they: jump, buck, stop, pick up leads and change leads effortlessly, turn, make transitions up and down and are nearly always in balance.

When we put the dead weight of a saddle and then a rider on the horse this picture just spoken of changes considerably. The horse will often learn to regain their balance with just the saddle quite quickly, when you add the live weight of a rider it makes the adjustment so much harder for the horse.

Can you imagine what it would be like for a human

to walk carrying a backpack up or down a hill, with someone pulling and pushing against your movement? In courses, I often use the example of having a person walk down a slight incline and then you give them a slight push from behind, they inevitably have to rush to regain their balance. You see the same situation with the horse on the ground and when ridden. When the horse is not in balance in the movement, the horse may need to rush and in cases jump, buck, etc to regain balance. (Remembering the horse may be bucking or running for a number of other reasons as well)

When balance is spoken off most times it is the horse's horizontal balance being referred to. The horse's weight ratio from the hindquarters to the forequarters. It is important to keep in perspective that a young newly started horse under saddle will not have the balance of an older well-ridden schooled horse.

Different exercises and disciplines may require more or less weight to the hindquarters and so a rider's effectiveness in being able to influence weight distribution and balance is very important. Balance is not static you don't have it one day and then you have it forever. As a rider you are constantly aware of the balance changes within gaits and movements. At times it will feel like a balancing act on a high wire

Laying a foundation for performance
is the best preparation for success for
both horse and rider

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Note the difference in balance on the young horse below after the second ride and the more advanced horse in the next image.



Riding is a lot more than just sitting on a horse and not falling off. For a rider to develop the feel to be able to move with the horse and stay in balance within the movements takes years of riding and schooling on the part of the rider. Having an independent seat, a good riding posture / position, are all-important basic fundamentals for the rider in influencing the balance of the horse for the better. Riding without stirrups, working on the lunge are exercises in helping the rider with the above. Learning to ride a unicycle will also help for the more adventurous. When the horse and rider are in balance with each other, the movement become so much lighter and the horse more responsive.

One way of helping the horse to become more balanced when riding is by keeping the poll as being the highest point of the horse's neck. This is not just a case of pulling the horse's head and neck up. Through schooling and as the horse tracks up more and takes more weight to the hindquarters and the horse's impulsion improves, the horse's poll will become elevated and again the horse will become more balanced. Of course you still have to have good hands as well. While I have spoken of some of the basic physical elements of a horse's balance. If the horse is not relaxed and is in fear or flight then this would again have an impact on a horse's balance.

The articles that I have written are not the be all and end all to feel, timing and balance. As I mentioned in Part 1 of this series the topics of feel, timing and balance are more like the search for the Holy Grail. Horsemanship is a constant and never ending search of improvement in awareness and understanding. We are all striving to get better and I wish all well in their horsemanship.