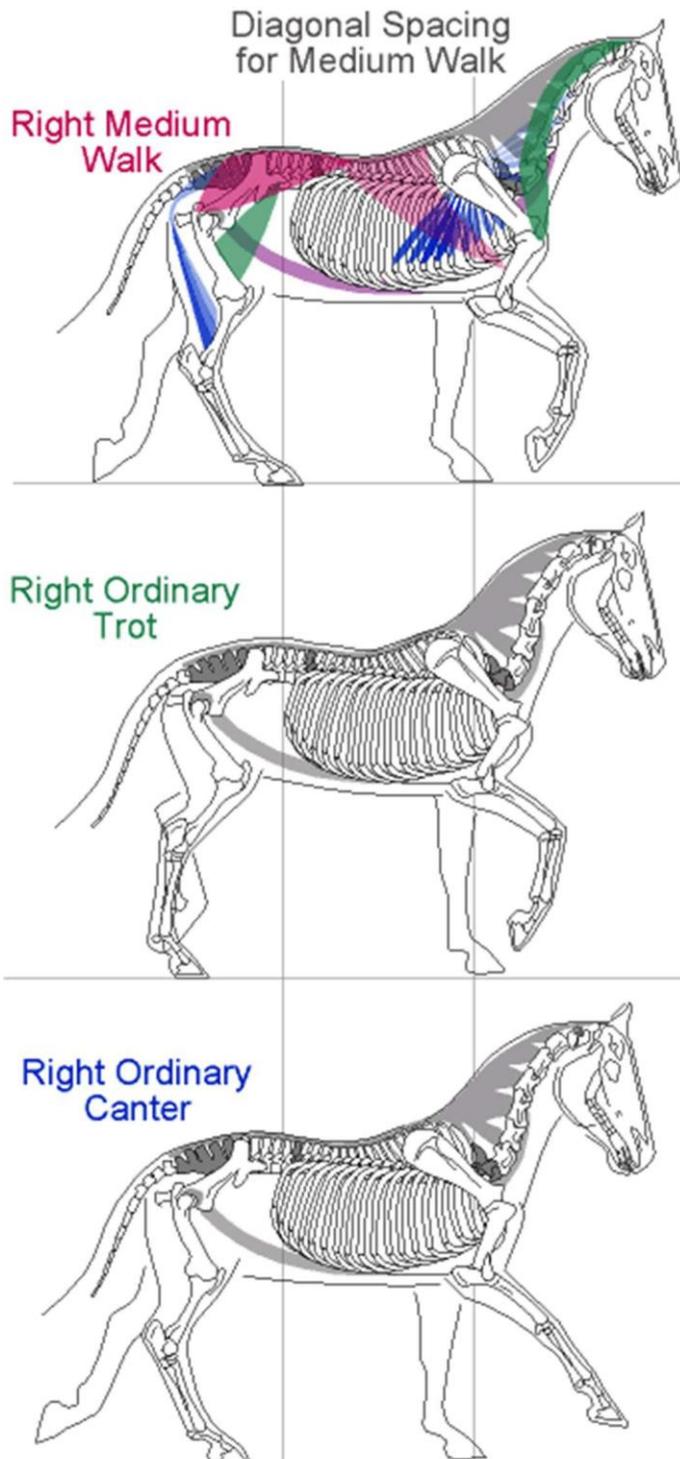


## Snippet 9: Transitions Between the Gaits

What a miracle. How does the horses' neurological firing work so quickly and so outwardly effortlessly for him to switch rhythms the way he can? Remembering that Rhythm is defined as the sequence of the footfalls, or The Beat, it is mind boggling that he can be cantering – 3 beat – and even halt next where there is an absence of rhythm.

The second miracle is that they will listen to our aids and switch upon request. What generous and intelligent partners we have!



As riders we need to be systematic about how we ask our partners to change from one rhythm to another. For down transitions, our body half halts come first to ask their hind legs to change and then as we hear/feel the response, use our reins for the front legs. This should ensure that down transition look and feel like the way airplanes land. Back wheels first and then onto the nose wheel. This is the goal of properly balanced dressage transitions which will produce high scores in English and Western dressage competitions. They are the kind of transitions which indicate that the training is correctly focused on back to front riding.

For up transitions, the same body use progression is required for the horse. The horse should firm its lower abdominals such as its ilio psoas muscles, coil its hindquarters under (engage) to the degree requested by the rider, engage the front end underline muscles and shoulders and Lift up off of the ground into the gait requested.

When progressing past the stage of simply getting a horse to move forward from the lower legs, a rider needs to refine both her expectations and her aids in order to achieve this quality of upward transitions. She needs to warn the horse that a transition is expected. Her understanding partner begins to increase positive muscle tensions to be ready for the transition moment. Then transitions will look like they lift horse and rider up off the ground so that the first step of the new gait has absolutely clear rhythm as well as achieving the required tempo for the task at hand.

To be a well-rounded rider, one needs to read as well as spend time in the saddle. In order to further understand the miracle of transitions from the horses' standpoint, the rider should at least be familiar with the "Phases" of each of the 3 gaits required in English and Western Dressage. Gaited horse riders need to add knowledge of their breed's gaits to the three under consideration here.

One of the most complete descriptions of the phases of

the gaits can be found in Susan Harris' book "Gaits, Balance and Movement", Macmillan General Reference, A Simon & Schuster Macmillan Company, New York, NY, 1993. Chapter 4 pages 32-63.

This material is readily available elsewhere. Probably it is not necessary to memorize all the sequences, but it is necessary to understand the swing phase of the limbs and the stance phase of the limbs. This goes back to the "rule" that the rider's aids must be applied in the Horses Rhythm. That extrapolates into the need to apply both forward and restraining aids at the time when it will be physically possible for the horse to respond to the request.

For example to produce a lateral step for a leg yield the rider must ask just at the end of the stance phase of the inside hind leg so as the horse picks up that leg for the swing phase it can be directed to swing sideways. This sounds daunting on paper, but with an in tune following seat, the rider will gain a feel for that timing.

