

The Balanced Position:

*It gets you over jumps and through the Standards.
Horses appreciate it, too.*

by Marilyn Yike,
USPC Vice President-Instruction

What is primary where riding in Pony Club is concerned?

First, the balanced position is the foundation for riding in Pony Club.

Second, the progression of the Standards is built around this basic seat.

A balanced position means the rider is *balanced* on the horse and *in balance* with the horse's movement. This position allows more effective application of the aids, gives better control of gaits, and is more comfortable for both horse and rider. By being in balance the rider does not use muscle power to maintain his position but relies on the same balance used in standing and walking. This allows the body to relax and be able to move with the horse's motion. A balanced rider permits the horse to move more freely and naturally, not impeded by a lack of rider stability and able to maintain its own balance and respond to its rider's aids. Other specialized styles of riding, such as hunt seat, saddle seat, and Western, are all adaptations of this same balanced seat.

Taught in Earliest Lessons

Pony Club teaches the balanced position from the earliest lessons. The D-1 test requires demonstration of the correct position (at the halt). The position described for beginners remains unchanged for upper levels; it merely develops sophistication, becoming more secure, independent, and effective. The most common reason for failure in the riding sections of the upper-level testings is lack of basic position, which prevents an independent seat and hinders effectiveness. The seat cannot become independent if it is not balanced. The aids cannot be effective without an

independent seat. The balanced seat is primary!

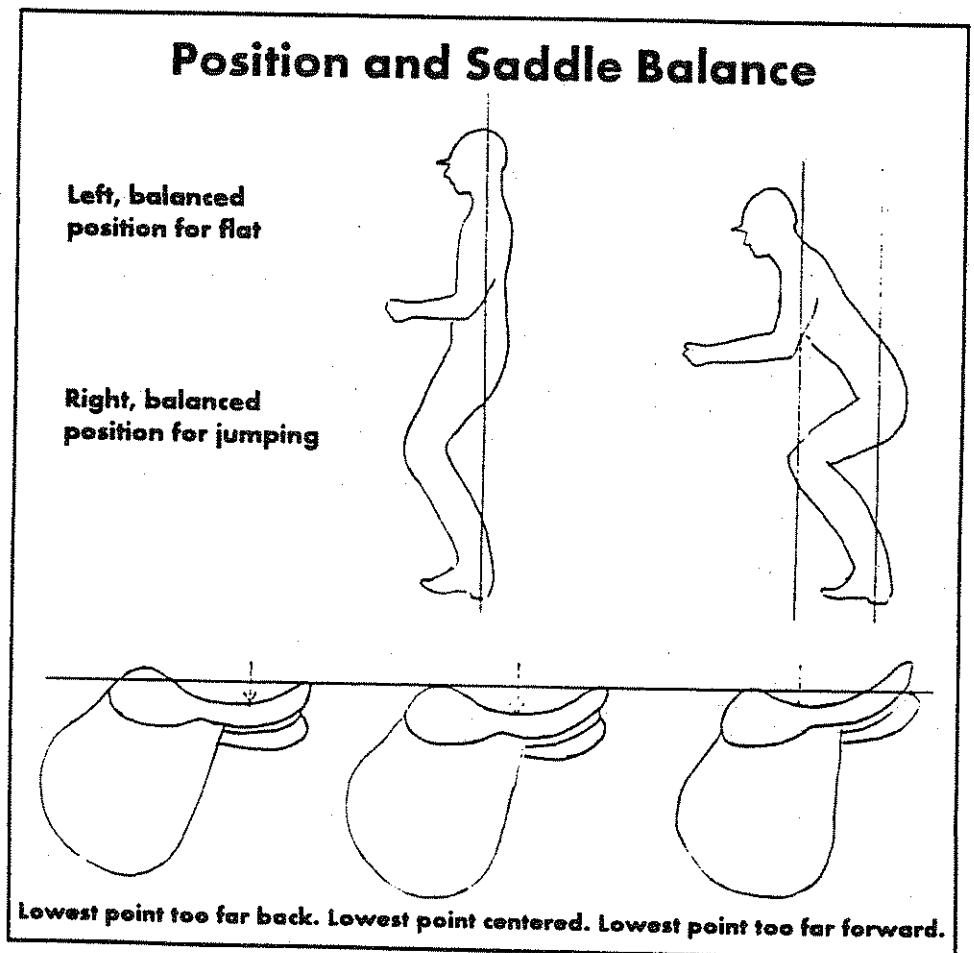
For riding in a balanced position on the flat, the rider should sit on the seat bones, shoulders over hips, head carried erect, arms hanging relaxed from shoulders, elbows at sides and bent allowing forearm and hand to maintain a straight line to the bit. The relaxed leg should lay softly against the horse's sides, knee pointing down, heel under hip, toe lifted into stirrup, stirrup leather remaining vertical. For jumping and for posting to the trot, the hip angle closes slightly, bringing the shoulders forward over the knees. The heel remains under

the hip, maintaining the rider's balance over the horse. This is the two-point or half-seat position.

Knees Flexed, Body Upright

The riding position is the same on the horse as it is on the ground. Stand with feet apart, knees flexed, body upright. If you are *not* balanced, you will fall over! Ride a horse with that same balance, feet under seat. Use that "on the ground" image to check for correct position. Visualize the rider without the horse. Would the rider stand . . . or fall?

The two most common position faults
Continued on next page



Pony Clubber! Have you had an experience that taught you a good lesson in horsemastership or safety? Share it. Send a brief article to USPC News.

Continued from page 10

are these: First, the rider's upper body is tipped forward, perched on crotch bone rather than sitting on seat bones, causing the leg to be unsteady. Second is the modified chair seat with rider sitting on tailbone, legs forward rather than under seat. Neither is balanced, and both inhibit effectiveness.

Imbalanced Rider, Imbalanced Horse

The rider's tipped-forward position places his weight in front of the horse's center of balance, pushing him onto his forehead and making it difficult for him to balance himself. The rider's seat bones are not in contact; the legs move back and forth. The rider is in front of the horse's motion. The chair seat places the rider's weight on the back of the saddle and behind the motion of the horse. The seat bones are in a constant driving position. This is uncomfortable for the horse, which then hollows its back and raises its head. It cannot relax or round its back or move freely forward on the aids. Again, effectiveness of the rider's seat and legs is lost.

The rider must be balanced laterally, as well. Some riders sit unevenly, collapsed through the waist, pushing the hips to one side and tilting the shoulders to compensate. Watch the rider from behind to check for straightness. The horse cannot be straight if its rider is crooked.

Saddle Balance Often Overlooked

A factor often overlooked in position problems is saddle balance. It is very difficult for the rider to sit correctly if the saddle tilts him forward or backward. Check saddles to see that the pommel and cantle are approximately level, with the lowest part of the seat in the center. Stirrup leathers should hang vertically, in line with the girth. An older saddle whose stuffing has packed down often sits the rider in the chair position. The horse's confirmation may tilt the saddle somewhat forward or backward. A small pad or folded towel can be used to lift the low end into balance, but be careful the new angle doesn't cause pressure on the other end!

Be sure there is sufficient clearance

between the saddle and the horse's spine when the rider is mounted. A saddle that is too wide may press on the spine and be painful. Additional pad(s) will lift the saddle off its back, but extra padding may make the saddle wobbly and less secure. A too-narrow saddle will sit high in front, and the points of the tree will press on the sides of the withers and the tops of the shoulders. A horse cannot work well if its back hurts. That uncooperative horse may be in pain! A good-quality, well-fitted, balanced saddle (good used ones can be found and older saddles can be restuffed) is a worthwhile investment toward the balanced position.

The balanced position, then, is this: It is more secure for the rider. It provides greater control of the horse. It is more comfortable. It contributes to confidence and enjoyment in riding. A balanced rider allows the horse to use its back correctly, which will improve its gaits and make it a happy, comfortable partner that enjoys its work. This is Pony Club's aim.

Happy balanced riding!

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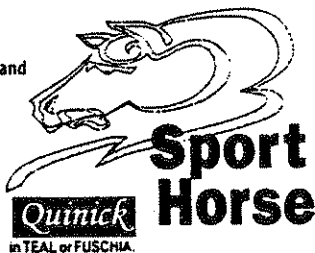
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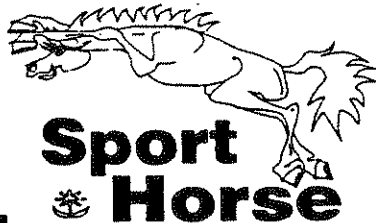
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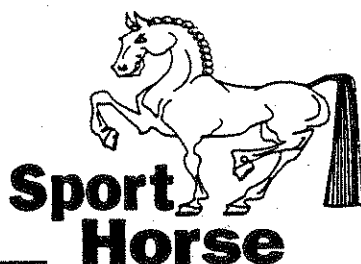
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Quinick
in TEAL or FUSCHIA.

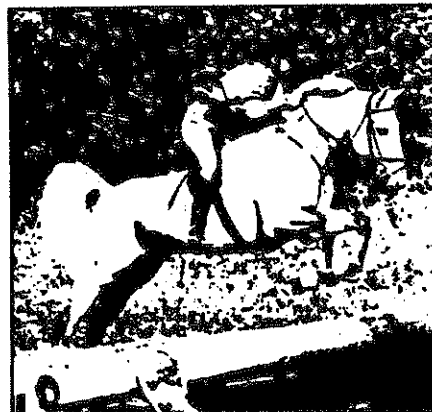


Ti is a bright, happy, neon horse.
NEON ORANGE, PINK & YELLOW The flower is YELLOW & GREEN.



Prompt
is an elegant horse. FUSCHIA, PURPLE with LAVENDER puff highlights.

These sweatshirts are classy enough to wear to town ...yet rugged enough to work the horses in.



Gina Owens photo

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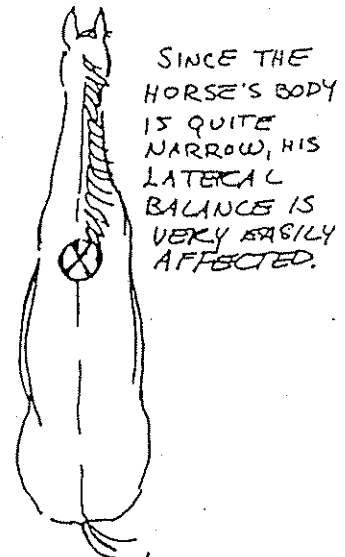
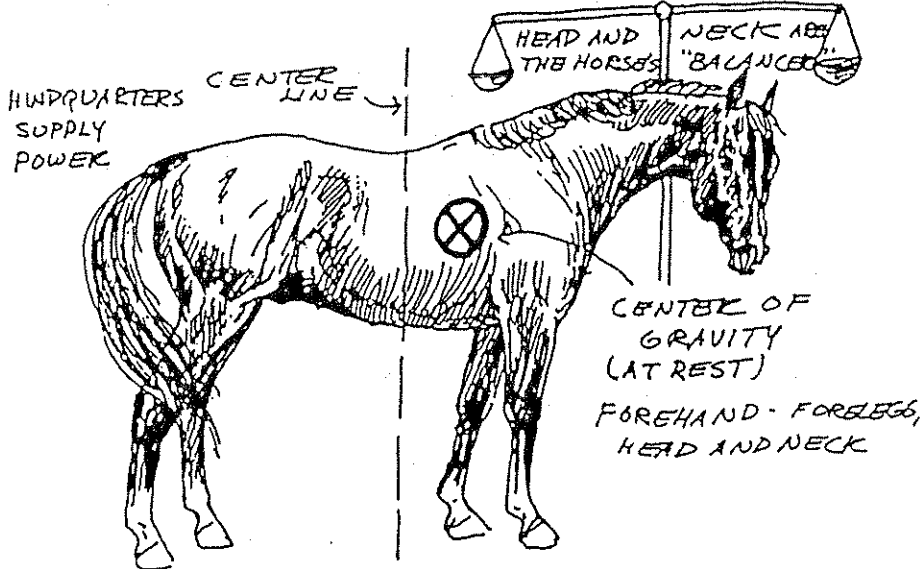
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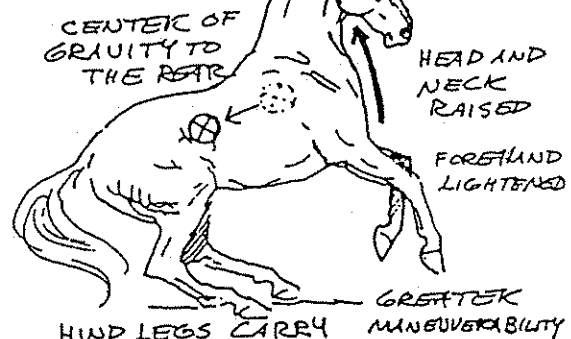
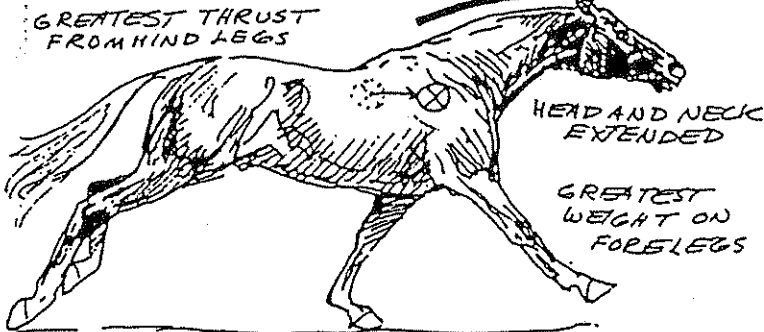
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BALANCE AND MOTION



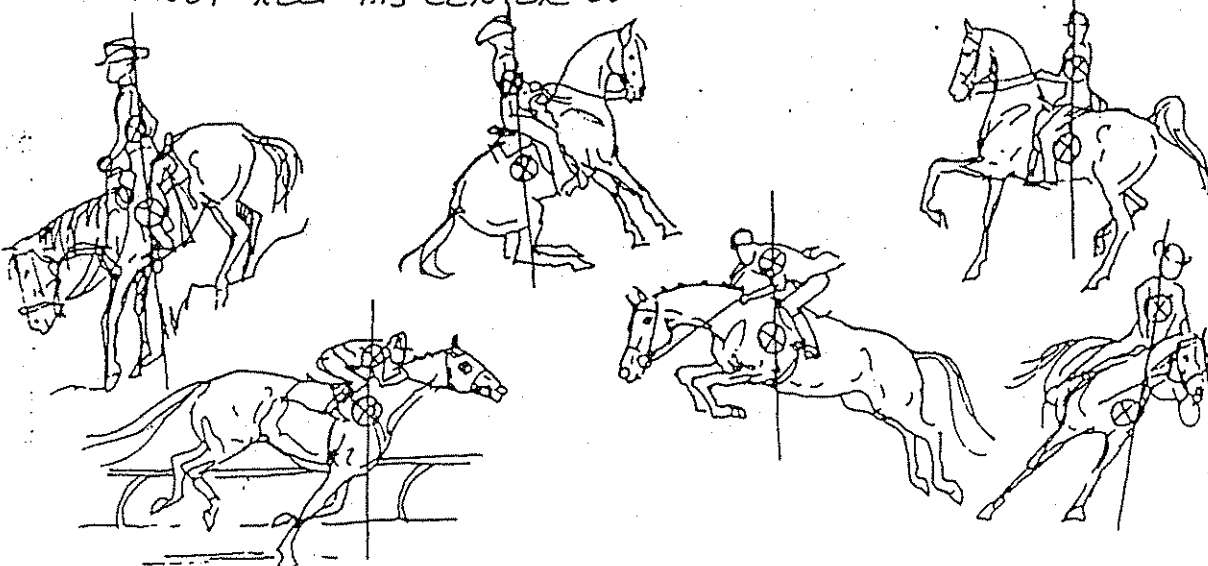
ABOUT 40% OF THE HORSE'S WEIGHT IS CARRIED BY THE HINDLEGS

THE FORELEGS CARRY ABOUT 60% OF THE WEIGHT.



CENTER OF GRAVITY FORWARD - AT SPEED

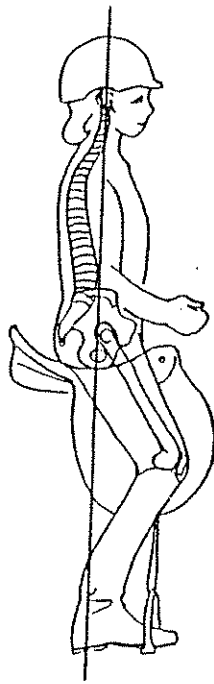
IN ORDER TO BE IN BALANCE WITH HIS HORSE, THE RIDER MUST KEEP HIS CENTER OF GRAVITY OVER THAT OF THE HORSE!



1. BALANCED RIDER:

VERTICAL LINE THROUGH EAR, SHOULDER, HIP, AND ANKLE.

PELVIS BALANCED ON SEAT BONES.



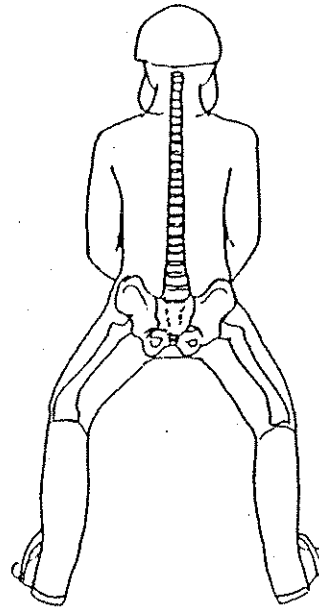
2. BALANCED RIDER:

HEAD BALANCED SHOULDERS EVEN

SPINE STRAIGHT

WEIGHT EVENLY BALANCED ON SEAT BONES

STIRRUPS EVEN

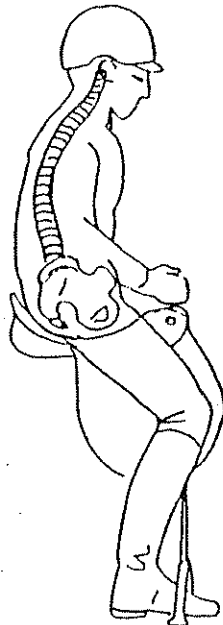


SLOUCHING RIDER
LOOKING DOWN
ROUND BACK

PELVIS TILTED BACKWARDS

WEIGHT ON BUTTOCKS

LEGS AHEAD
HEELS UP

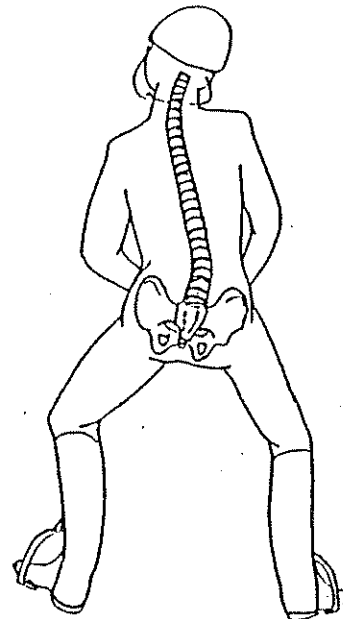


CROOKED RIDER:
TILTED HEAD
SHOULDERS UNEVEN
CROOKED BACK
COLLAPSED HIP

UNEVEN WEIGHT ON SEAT BONES

ELBOW, KNEE AND TOE STICKING OUT

UNEVEN STIRRUPS



STIFF, HOLLOW RIDER

HEAD HIGH
NECK CRAMPED

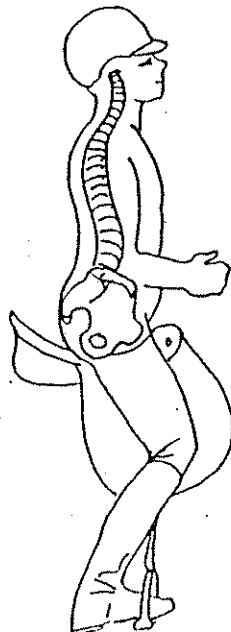
HOLLOW BACK

PELVIS TILTED FORWARD

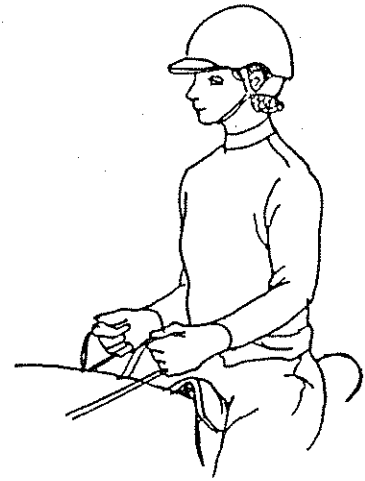
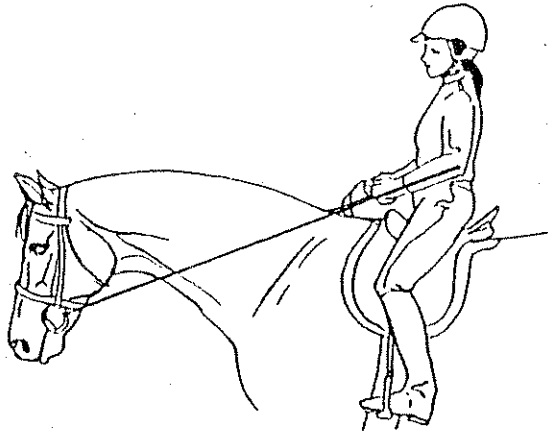
WEIGHT ON CROTCH

KNEES PINCHING

LEG TOO FAR BACK

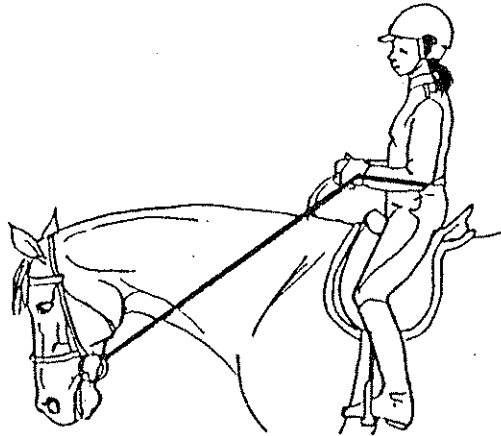


CORRECT:
STRAIGHT LINE
FROM ELBOW
TO BIT.

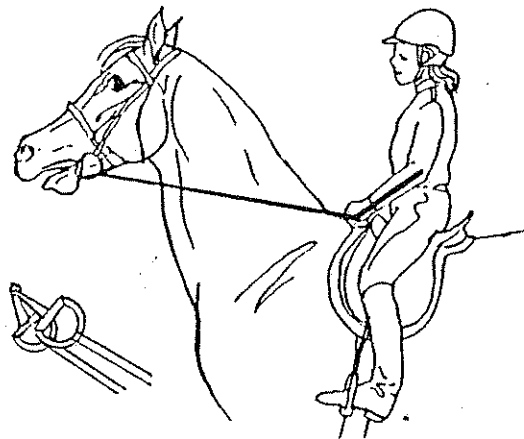


CORRECT
HAND, ARM,
AND SHOULDER
POSITION.

WRONG: HANDS
TOO HIGH; LINE
BROKEN
UPWARD.



WRONG:
HANDS TOO LOW -
LINE FROM
ELBOW TO BIT
BROKEN DOWNWARD.



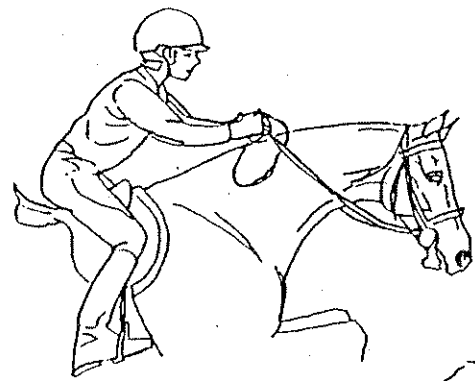
SNaffle BIT
'BREAKS',
CAUSING PINCHING
EFFECT ON EARS
OF MOUTH.



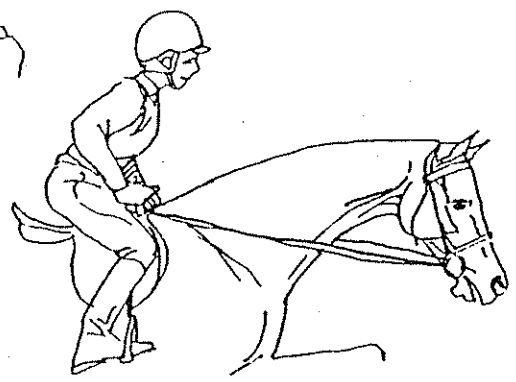
WRONG:
FLAT HANDS,
ROUND SHOULDERS,
PULLING.

RIDER
HAND AND
RELEASE
FAULTS:

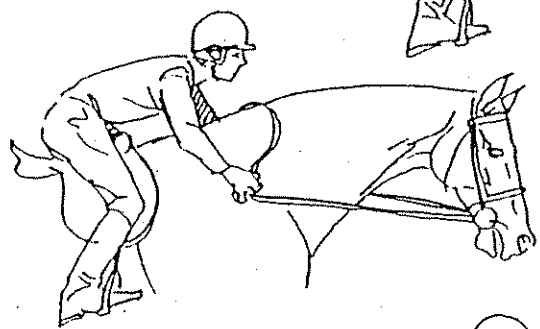
A. HANDS
TOO FAR
FORWARD;
ABOVE
CREST.



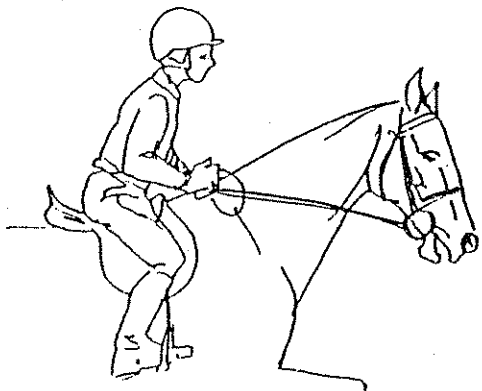
B. REINS TOO LONG;
HANDS TOO FAR
BACK; ELBOWS
OUT.



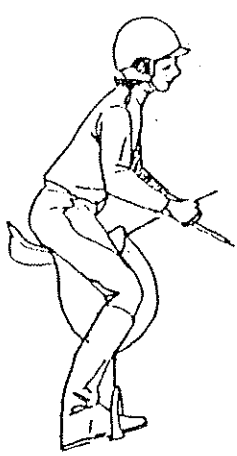
C. HANDS
TOO LOW;
LINE BROKEN
DOWNWARD.



D. STIFF, TIGHT
HANDS; NO
RELEASE



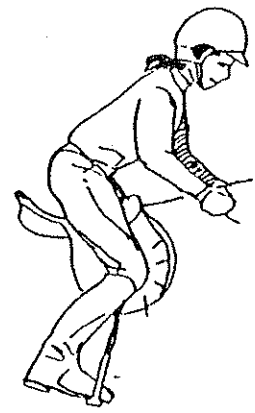
GOOD
JUMPING
POSITION



STANDING UP
AHEAD OF THE
MOTION; HOLLOW
BACK.



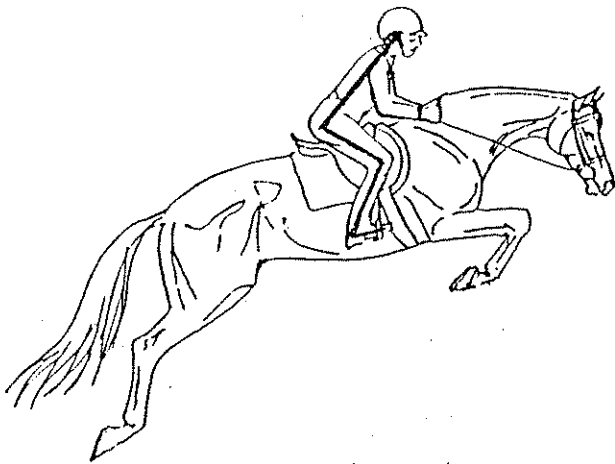
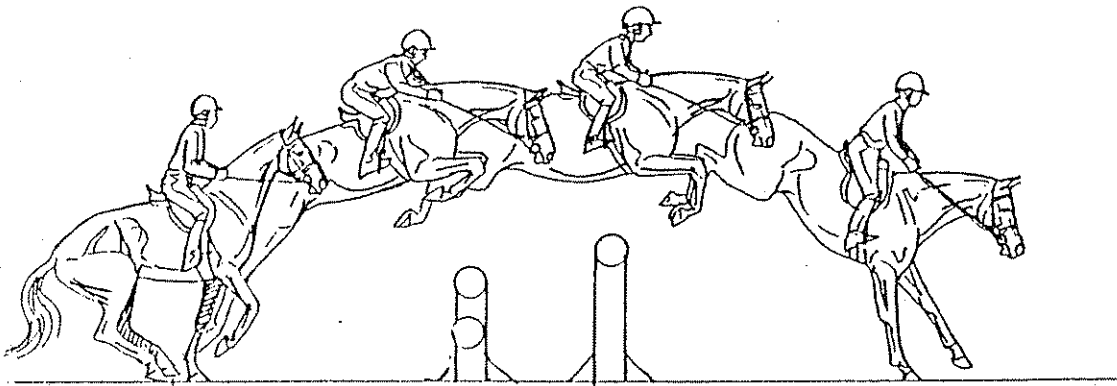
BEHIND THE
MOTION; LEL
ROTATES
FORWARD;
ROUND BACK.



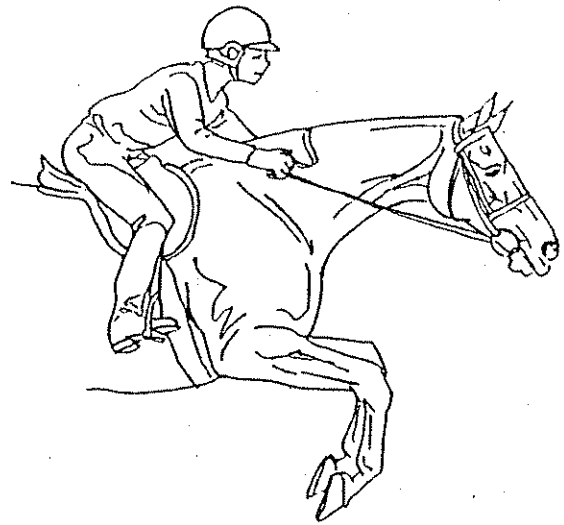
LOOKING
DOWN;
PINCHING
KNEES; LEL
PIVOTS BACK
WITH HEEL UP.



DUCKING.



THE THRUST
OF THE PONY'S
JUMP CLOSES
THE RIDER'S
ANGLES.



AUTOMATIC RELEASE
OR JUMPING OUT OF HAND.

BASIC
POSITIONS
AND STIRRUP
LENGTHS:

A. DRESSAGE
SEAT



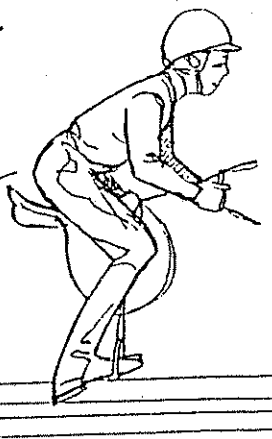
B. GENERAL
PURPOSE
BALANCED
SEAT



C. JUMPING
SEAT



D. GALLOPING
SEAT



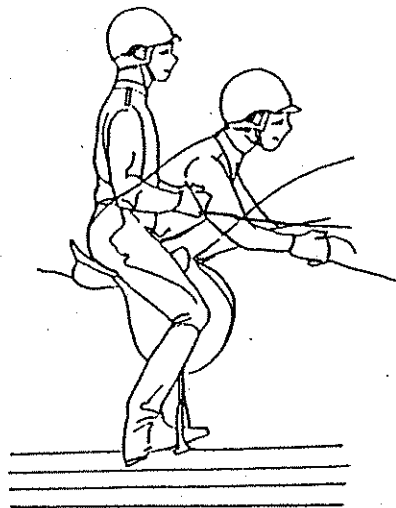
A

B

C

D

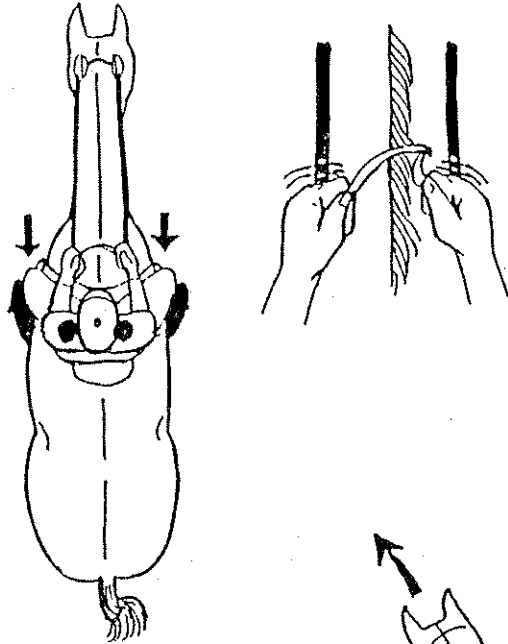
E. SHOW
JUMPING
SEAT



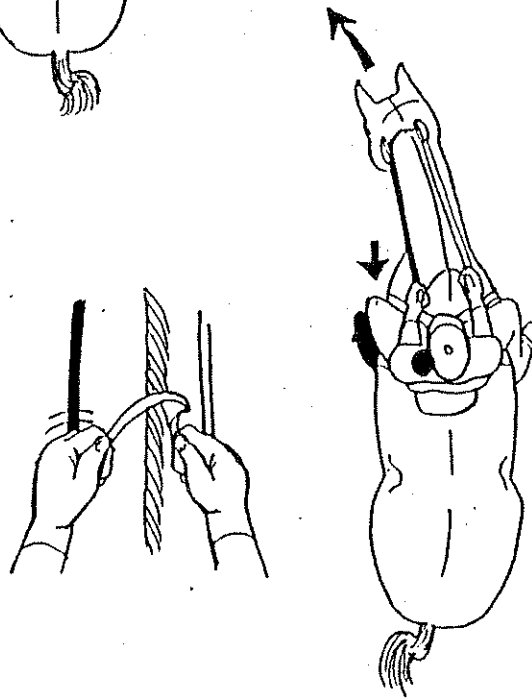
E

REIN AIDS

A. DIRECT
REIN,
BOTH HANDS,
BOTH LEGS.
HALT OR
SLOW DOWN.

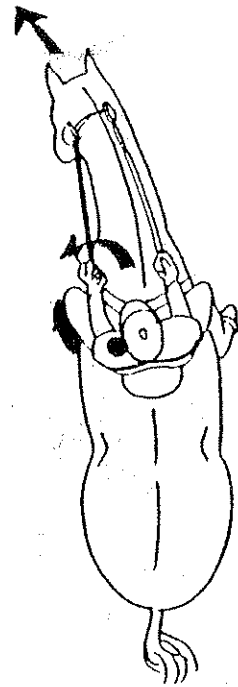
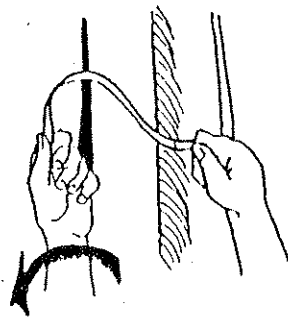


B. DIRECT
REIN,
LEFT HAND,
LEFT LEG
ACTIVE AT
GIRTH,
RIGHT LEG
BEHIND GIRTH,
RIGHT
SUPPORTING
REIN.

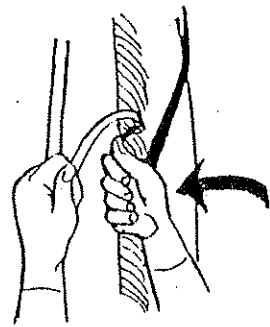
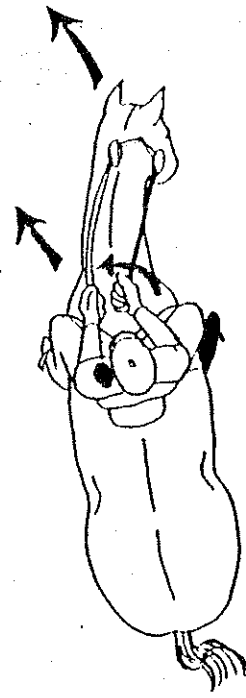


BEND AND
TURN TO
LEFT.

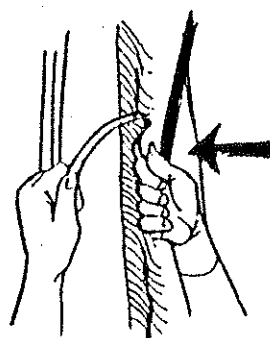
C. OPENING
OR
LEADING
REIN



D. NECK
REIN OR
BEARING
REIN.



E. INDIRECT
REIN



Basic Balanced Position

Flat

- Vertical line through head, shoulder, hip, ankle
 - Spine erect
 - Pelvis in neutral position with seat bones pointing down, hip joints on vertical
 - Seat balanced in the lowest part of the saddle
- Note: Correct & functional saddle design, balance, & fit very important*
- Head balanced, eyes up, looking toward focal pt.

•Laterally symmetrical

•arms resting along torso, elbows bent, held 2-3" in front of hip, straight line through straight wrist to bit

•shoulders free from tension, shoulder blades hanging down

•chest open

•hands softly closed, thumbs on top

•heel below toe, stirrup placed behind ball of foot

Half Seat, Fences, Galloping as above, with:

- stirrups shortened
- knees, ankles flexed under body
- head, shoulder, hips in same plane

- eyes focused on focal points
- stirrup leather perpendicular to ground
- hands in front of shoulders as necessary to allow horse use of neck
- hips behind heels

...Position Shortcomings

- Not on vertical line
- chair seat, c-curve(Spine slouched, head down, head shoulders in front of vertical, hands flat)
 - braced position(head, shoulders behind hips, knees locked, foot braced in front of vertical, ankle locked)
 - hollow back, 'military chest'(arched back, pinched knee, ankle behind vertical, chin too high, elbows straight)
- head unbalanced: eyes down

•Laterally asymmetrical (collapsed side, shoulders, hips, and/or knees unlevel)

•arms :deviations from elbow-wrist-bit straight line (elbows straight, elbows out, wrists bent
arms clamped to sides

•shoulders: tight, rounded, hunched
shoulder blades excessively drawn together

•chest collapsed

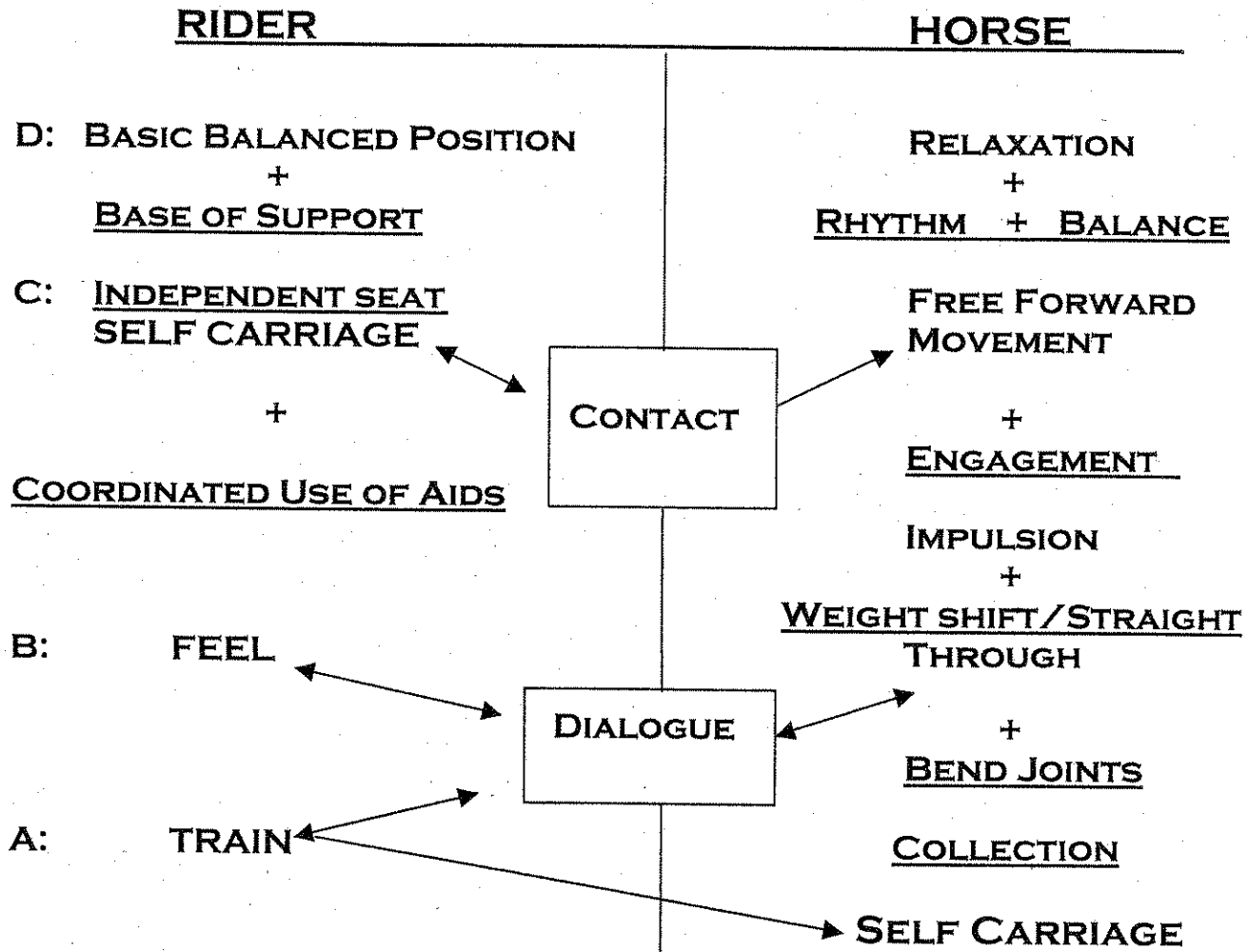
•hands: rotated: flat('piano' hands)
fingers open
fist clenched

•heels: up, braced/locked
stirrup on toe/shot through

Half Seat, Fences, Galloping as above, with:

- joints braced/too open/excessive fold
- head out of balance: chin leading, head down
- eyes down
- Leg off vertical
- hands behind shoulders/restricting
- hips forward, seat bones forward, pelvis tilted back.

THE RIDING PUZZLE
 (AKA "RIDING FOR DUMMIES")



Test Expectations

What follows are the test expectations at each of the levels through C2 and an overall picture of what that means to an examiner. A definition and detailed explanation of what each term means and how it relates to each level will come later. BBP means Basic Balanced Position; BOS means Base of Support; w,t,c is walk -trot- canter; FFM means free, forward movement; tx means transition

Flat:

Fences:

D1:demonstrate BBP halt & walk	demonstrate BBP at w over poles
D2:maintain BBP w,t/developing at C	developing jumping position
D3:rides in BBP w,t,c	developing bal & steady pos over fences
C1: BBP w/confidence & control w/use of natural aids begin FFM, begin est light feel of pony's mouth	rides w/confidence in BBP w/natural aids over fences
C2: secure BBP progress toward independent seat, coordinated use of aids	rides w/confidence,control,demonstrates secure BBP over fences
C3:demonstrate coord use aids, initiate FFM, smooth tx w/steady feel	show confidence & control

In essence, riders should demonstrate the overall abilities at the following ratings levels:

D1: stop, steer, show correct position at walk and over poles

D2: Be able to be safe cross country: stay on at the canter, use eyes to see where they are going, be able to keep pony from grazing, be able to shorten from the buckle in motion, able to maintain correct BBP at w and t, and be safe at the canter

D3: Be solid and correct in BBP in all 3 gaits on flat ,sitting and in half seat and over fences, be able to stay on if the pony stops or runs out at a fence, be able to maintain a steady rhythm to and away from fence.

C1: Can 'drive'- able to effectively keep pony from cutting corners or running out by use of seat, legs and hands; is correct more often than not, is beginning

to get free forward movement, can ride pony on contact, can bring pony under control

C2: Rides in correct BBP all the time, well on the way to an independent seat (can separate body parts, do not rely on hands or grip for balance, following seat, timing, release and control over fence) with coordinated use of aids (clear use and understanding of inside and outside aids, able to do 2 things at once, half halts) should be able to get FFM (get the pony moving), with tactful hands.

C3: All previous levels are cumulative. rider is expected to ride in correct position at all times (see D3), must be able to show that through correct use of aids they are able to get the horse working correctly. (rider, not horse, must show correct training) and be able to get and keep FFM, with smooth, accurate, balanced txs. Rider should now be able to ride with consistently correct contact. There should be no inconsistencies at this level.

USPC Riding Skills Definitions

Basic Balanced Position:

This is the universal basis for specialized styles of riding such as hunt seat, saddle seat, western and roping seats. It is the foundation for the development of an independent seat and coordinated use of aids.

On the flat, this is a position, when viewed from the side, which permits a vertical line to be drawn from the top of the rider's head, through the ear, point of shoulder, point of hip joint and ankle. As stirrups are shortened for work in two-point or over fences the upper body inclines forward with a flat back to bring the shoulders over the knees while the ankle remains under the hip.

Independent Seat:

A position with relaxed, open joints that allow the rider's body to flow with the movements of the horse and remains unchanged by action of hands and legs.

Base of Support:

Proper base of support allows horse to move forward through flexible (receiving) joints. Breathing with the motion, rider's leg is under rider with even leg contact from hip down. Base of Support equals a Dynamic basic balanced position.

The seat and inner thigh (the weight bearing surfaces) supplemented by the lower leg and foot when posting, galloping and jumping. The width of this base is dependent on the length of stirrup. Long stirrups have a very narrow base of support, concentrating weight in a small area, requiring an independent seat, excellent balance and tactful aids. Only more experienced riders, well-balanced riders should ride with long stirrups. A shorter stirrup offers a wider base of support, improving stability of upper body, and is more appropriate for novice riders and for jumping.

Coordinated use of aids:

Use of seat, leg and hands independently and/or in coordination with each other, and with movements of the horse. An independent seat is the basis of coordinated use of aids.

Free Forward Movement:

Horse is relaxed in back and unencumbered by resistance caused by rider's lack of independence or coordination. Horse is moving forward purposefully. Movement is willing, rhythmic, balanced and relaxed. Horse's back and belly line are up and free from tension. Horse is tracking up creating equal triangles with legs.

✓

A