

# Watch Your Seat!

by Lee Ziegler

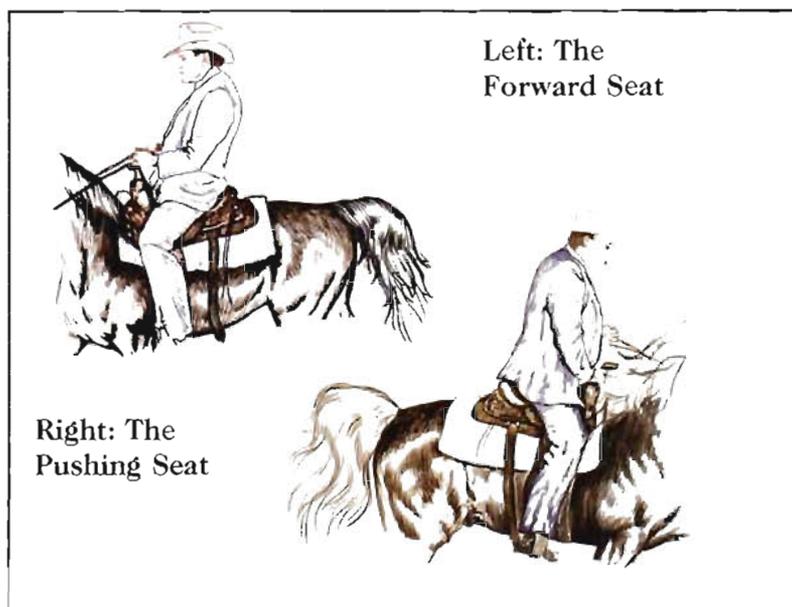
**There are about as many ways to sit a horse as there are horses and riders. Is one way "better" than the others? Does one way encourage a square gait more than the others? You might be surprised.**

**T**he "Turtleman" posture, aka "Frog on a lily pad", common among Walking Horse exhibitors, is characterized by hunching from the shoulders and slouching somewhat forward with the head leaning noticeably forward, which gives the rider a hunchbacked appearance. Most concede, it doesn't look very pretty. So why is it still popular?

The answer is simple. Judges tie horses ridden this way, because horses that are shod/trained/built/used to this type of seat move out well. This style of riding places the rider's weight further back on the horse's spine, inflicting a forced lowering and stretching down of the back \*(ventroflexion). This, coupled with the driving from the seatbones, drives the horse to move under himself more to compensate for the force on his spine. The effect is an increase in length of stride and animation.

The "leaning man" is now in vogue with Fox Trotter exhibitors who have taken to leaning forward and standing in the stirrups. This stance gives the decided impression that the gait is rough to sit. By shifting their weight and balance forward, the rider causes the horse to rush his front hoof to the ground and do a heavy-on-the-forehand version of the fox trot. This speeds up the gait, and often, more speed wins.

The "chair seat" is very common in many gaited circles. Riders look as though they are so comfortable, they have just plopped into their favorite easy



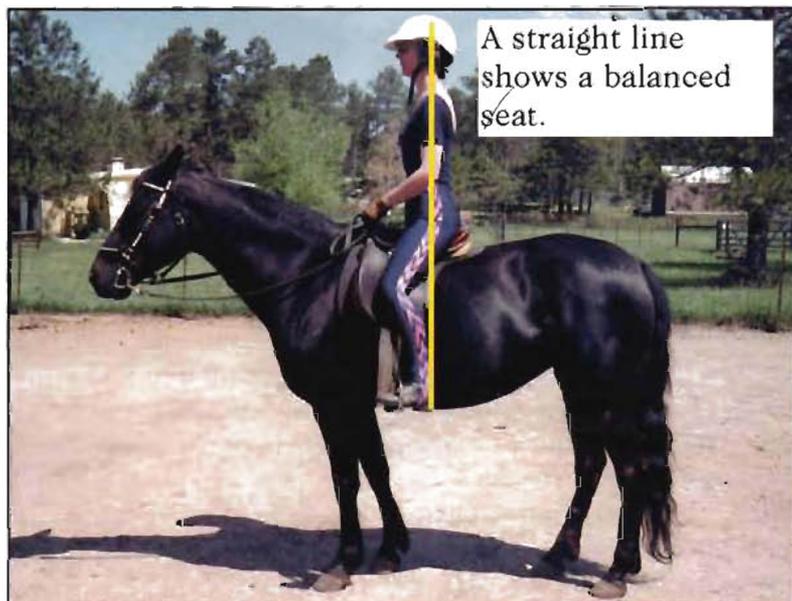
Left: The Forward Seat

Right: The Pushing Seat

Art Work: Rebecca Turner

**Misunderstood Forward Seat.** Overweights the horse's shoulders, places the rider's balance ahead of the horse's center of motion.

**Misunderstood "Pushing" Seat.** Overweights the horse's loin. Places the rider's balance behind the horse's center of motion.



A straight line shows a balanced seat.

Models: Kathryn Utke, on her Fox Trotter, Perfection's Black Rhythm.

**Classic Dressage Seat.** Arched back, shoulder over hip, hip over heels. Useful for encouraging a pacey horse to rack, a racky horse to running walk, a running walking horse to fox trot. It allows the horse's back to rise and arch more easily than the usual dressage seat

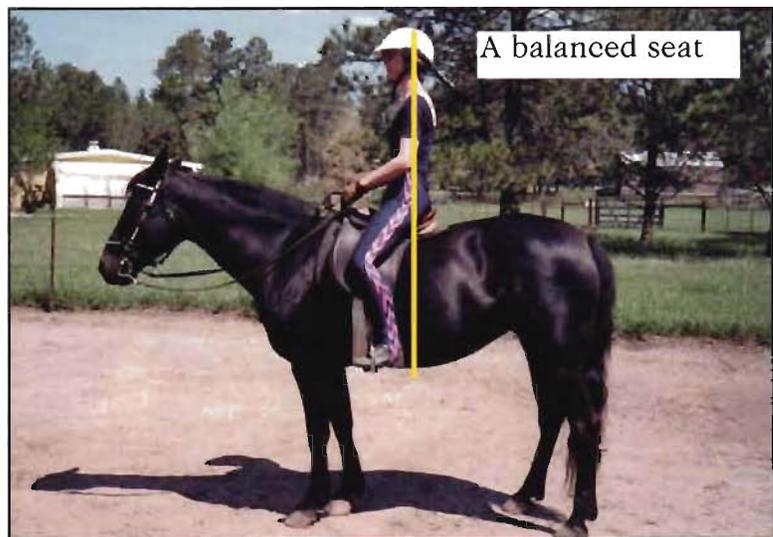
chair, legs forward, weight back and back generally straight, to slightly leaned back. Tailor made to the cutback saddle, this style of riding may be comfortable, but is not balanced. A balanced seat requires that the ear, shoulder, elbow, knee and ankle bone all be in alignment - a straight line drawn from ear to ankle should pass through all these points. This seat both contributes to and is a sign of, a lack of muscle tone in the rider's thighs.

"Hunt seat" refers to a forward position, that is actually well-balanced, but forward of the horse's center of gravity. This forces the weight of the rider over the shoulders, which can interfere with the free shoulder motion necessary for maximum efficiency in gait. This is the seat of choice for posting the trot or clearing fences!

The "dressage seat", whether Spanish, French or German, presents the best possible posture on a gaited, or any horse, that doesn't jump or race for a living. Sit up straight, yet relaxed, not rigid, in a balanced posture. This is where the straight line from ear to ankle should intersect those critical points. Your weight should be distributed over, or ever so slightly behind, the horse's center of gravity. Keep your back straight - not stiff, not swayed inward, or hunched outward. This allows you to rock forward or backward slightly by tipping your pelvis, to shift your weight and adjust your seat along with the horse's movement.

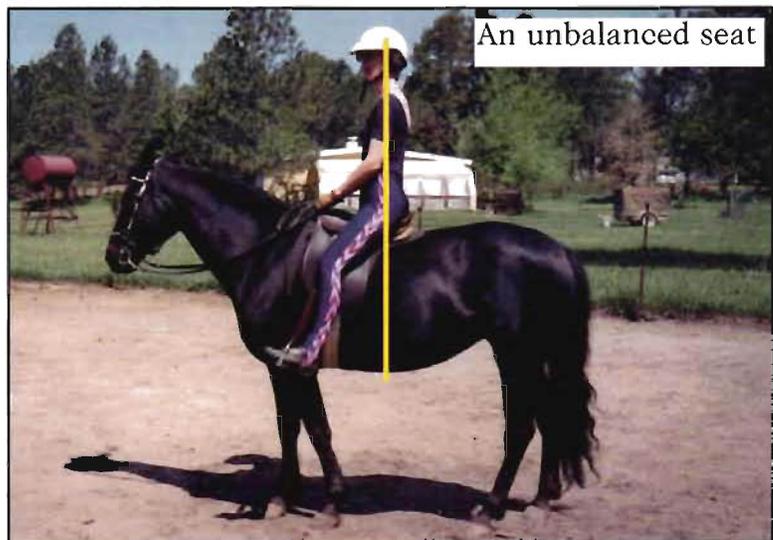
If you're not sure which seat your style of riding represents have someone take your photo, or better yet video you as you ride. Put the horse through different gaits to see if your riding style changes at speed, or in circles, etc. No camera? An easy way to "see for yourself" is to ride along-

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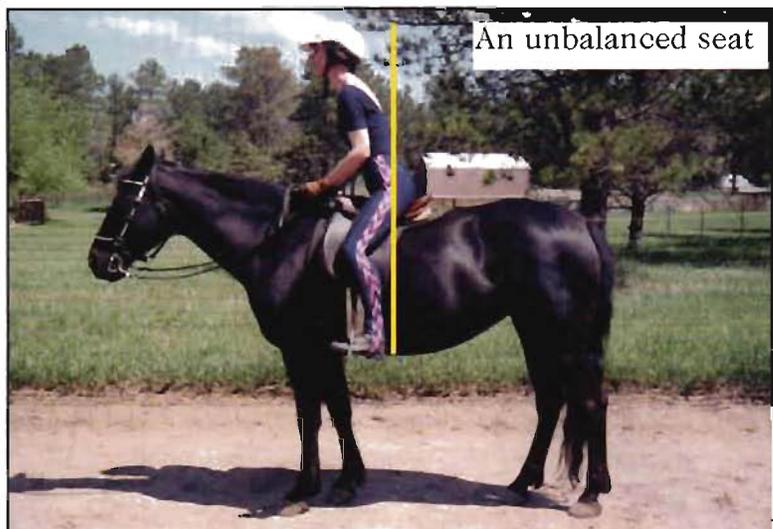
**A balanced seat**

**Pushing Dressage Seat.** Lower back is held flat (no arch). A useful bases position for all gaits. Works well on trotty fox trotters, and fox trotting Walking Horses. The seat works in western saddles, provided the saddle is built with the stirrups hung in this position.



**An unbalanced seat**

**Chair Seat.** Rider's legs ahead of her center of balance. Useful for encouraging a rack or stepping pace. Puts weight over the horse's loin.



**An unbalanced seat**

**Forward Seat.** Useful for encouraging a hard trot, discouraging a pace. Also useful for hill climbing and jumping.

## WATCH YOUR SEAT CONTINUED

side windows or glass doors and use them as a mirror. If your style isn't balanced, adjust your seat accordingly, paying attention to how it feels. In time, with practice, you and your horse can achieve the balance you both need to perform your best, in relaxed comfort.

