



Tennessee Walking Horses

The Basics



compiled by Sis Osborne



Originally bred as a utility horse, the Tennessee Walking Horse is best suited for a recreational mount due to its smooth, easy ride and its gentle disposition. A calm, docile temperament, combined with naturally smooth and easy gaits insure the popularity of the Tennessee Walking Horse as the world's greatest show, trail and pleasure horse.

A light horse breed founded in Middle Tennessee, this breed is a composition of Standardbred, Thoroughbred, Morgan, and American Saddlebred stock.

Tennessee Walking Horses generally range from 14.3 to 17 hands and weigh 900 to 1200 pounds. The modern Tennessee Walking Horse possesses a pretty head with small, well placed ears. The horse has a long sloping shoulder, a long sloping hip, a fairly short back and short, strong coupling. The bottom line is longer than the top line, allowing for a long stride.

Tennessee Walking Horses come in all colors and a variety of patterns. The diverse color choices are sure to please any horse enthusiast.

The Tennessee Walking Horse performs three distinct gaits: the flat foot walk, running walk and canter. These three are the gaits for which the Tennessee Walking Horse is famous, with the running walk being an inherited, *natural* gait unique to this breed. Many Tennessee Walking Horses are able to perform the rack, stepping-pace, fox-trot, single-foot and other *variations* of the famous running walk. While not desirable in the show ring the above mentioned gaits are smooth, easy, trail riding gaits.

The flat foot walk is a brisk, long-reaching walk that can cover from 4 to 8 miles an hour. This is a four cornered gait with each of the horse's feet hitting the ground separately at regular intervals. The horse will glide over the track left by the front foot with his hind foot: right rear over right front, left rear over left front. The action of the back foot slipping over the front track is known

as overstride. Overstride is unique to the walking horse breed. The hock should show only forward motion; vertical hock action is highly undesirable. A Tennessee Walking Horse will nod its head in rhythm with the cadence of its feet. This nodding head motion, with the overstride, are two features that are unique to the Tennessee Walking Horse. This distinctive head motion along with overstride are both things the judge should take into consideration when judging a Tennessee Walking Horse.

The running walk is the gait for which the Tennessee Walking Horse is most noted! This extra-smooth, gliding gait is basically the same as the flat walk with a noticeable difference in the rate of speed between the two gaits. Proper form should never be sacrificed for excessive speed in a good running walk. The breed can travel 10 to 20 miles per hour at this gait. As the speed is increased, the horse over-steps the front track with the back foot by a distance of 6 to 18 inches. The more "stride" the horse has, the better "walker" it is considered to be. It is this motion that gives the rider a feeling of gliding through the air as if propelled by some powerful but smooth-running machine. Since their gaits are easy for them to perform, some Tennessee Walking Horses relax certain muscles while executing the running walk; they may flop their ears in rhythm and some even snap their teeth. The running walk is a smooth, easy gait for both horse and rider. A true Tennessee Walking Horse will continue to nod while performing the running walk. Judging should not be influenced by speed, but rather by the true form exhibited.

The third gait is the canter, which is a collected gallop. The canter is performed in much the same way as other breeds, but the Tennessee Walking Horse seems to have a more relaxed way of performing this gait. The canter is a forward movement performed in a diagonal manner to the right or to the left. On the right lead, the horse should start the gait in this order: left hind, right hind and left fore together, then right fore. The footfall of the left lead is: right hind, left hind and right fore, then left fore. When performed in a ring, the animal should lead his canter with the fore leg to the inside of the ring. In the canter the horse gives one the abundance of ease with lots of spring and rhythm, with the proper rise and fall to afford a thrill from sitting in the saddle. Thus the canter lifts with the front end giving an easy rise and fall motion that is likened to a rocking chair. This is often referred to as the "rocking chair" gait.



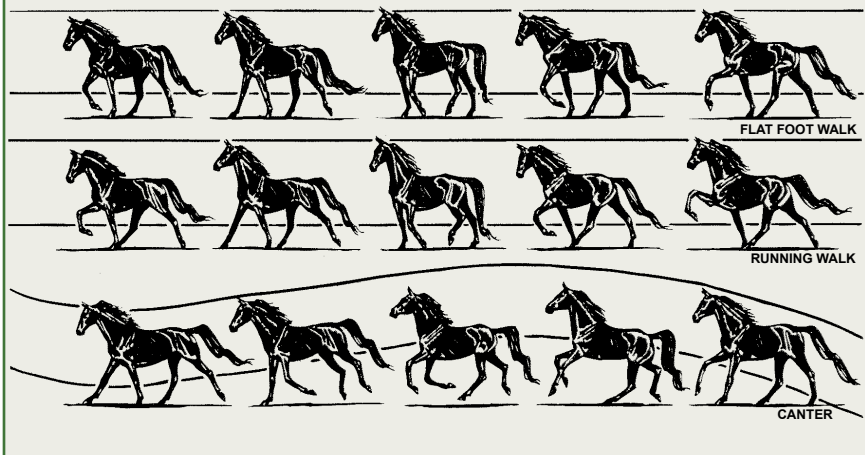
Suggestions For Judging the Tennessee Walking Horse

The Tennessee Walking Horse is shown under both English and Western tack and attire. There are divisions for both built up and flat shod horses in the show ring.

The flat shod horse segment of the walking breed has grown tremendously due to the easy training of the breed, and the natural inherited gaits. Many people are able to maintain their horse without the aid of a professional.

The flat shod **plantation pleasure** horse should display brilliance and show presence while performing true walking gaits. Any tendency to pace, rack or trot should be penalized. Form is not to be sacrificed for speed. The horse is to be well mannered and manageable on a light rein. Manners are paramount for a pleasure horse and should be given serious consideration in judging. The horse should be well balanced, both fore and rear. He must back readily on command, and respond to rider signals to perform all gaits without necessity of bumping and pumping of the reins. The horse shall enter the ring at a flat walk, and when the gate is closed, the judge shall call for the running walk, flat walk and canter. The head motion of the horse is very important. *If he isn't nodding, he isn't walking.* Horses shall be worked both ways of the ring. English tack and attire are mandatory for this class unless otherwise specified. Neatness and taste in attire are encouraged and should be a consideration in the final judging.

The Gaits of the Tennessee Walking Horse



In a **model** class the horse should be shown in a bridle, led into the ring and parked for judging. Conformation and condition are paramount. Horses must stand quietly, unruly entries must be excused.

Western pleasure entries shall reflect the suitability of a Tennessee Walking Horse as a western working horse, exhibiting qualities suitable for ranch work. The western pleasure horse works quietly,

exhibiting an exceptionally smooth, comfortable ride without excessive animation. A good western pleasure horse should have a balanced, flowing

gait. The horse should be ridden on a loose rein, and should exhibit a true, four-beat walking gait with a cadenced head nod. The head set should be natural, neither excessively nosed out nor over flexed at the poll. The head should not be high but should exhibit the type of carriage necessary for a western working horse. If a western horse does not stand quietly, he *must* be penalized. If



a western horse is ridden with two hands at any time (other than a horse four years old and under wearing a ring snaffle bit or bosal), it *must* be penalized.

If a western horse has a fast, uncontrolled canter or requires pumping or bumping, he *must* be penalized.

The **performance** Tennessee Walking Horse (sometimes referred to as padded or built up) is shown in English attire and tack. It executes the basic gaits with more animation and accentuated brilliance.



Tips for Evaluating the Conformation of the Tennessee Walking Horse

by Dr. Randall Baker, DVM and Sis Osborne

Conformation: The term conformation includes type, muscling, balance and structural smoothness. It also includes the form and proportion of the various parts of the body.

Type: The 'type' of a horse depends upon the function a horse is to perform. A Tennessee Walking Horse is a light horse type. Desirable type in saddle horses requires a horse of medium size and weight, generally ranging in height from 14.3 to 17 hands and weighing from 900 to 1200 pounds. This horse has a long sloping shoulder, a long sloping hip, a fairly short back and short, strong coupling. The bottom line is longer than the top line, allowing a long stride.

Balance: A balanced appearance comes from the forequarter and hindquarters appearing to be of nearly equal size and development. They "fit" together well.

Head: The walking horse's head should be in proportion to the rest of the animal's body. The head and throatlatch should be refined and clean-cut, with the facial bones exhibiting a chiseled appearance. The eyes should show character, being of good size and well placed, with good width between the eyes. The eyes should be clear and bright. The face should be straight, rather than convex (Roman-nosed) or concave (dish-faced). The ears should be well set, medium to small in size, and they should be carried forward showing attentiveness. The muzzle should be small, with large, sensitive nostrils. The upper and lower teeth should meet. The jaw should show bone structure but should not show excessive thickness.

Neck: The head should join the neck at approximately a 45 degree angle, with a distinct space between the jawbone and neck. The neck should be medium to long in length, and the head should be carried high. In the adult, the neck should be slightly arched. The neck should be lean and muscular and blend smoothly into the shoulders and withers. Excessive arching or a crested neck is undesirable.

Shoulders and Withers: The shoulder should be long and should slope forward at an angle of 45 degrees from the withers to the point of the shoulder. The shoulder should be smooth, yet well muscled. The withers should be well defined and extending beyond the top of the shoulder. The top of the withers should be at least as high as the top of the rump.

Chest and Forelegs: The chest should be of moderate depth and width, with good depth being exhibited into the forerib and barrel. A good heart girth and well-sprung ribs give room for good respiration. The forearms should be set apart enough to prevent interference of the fore-legs and should be set well forward of the shoulder, blending well. The forearm should be moderately muscled and taper into the knee smoothly from the side, front, or rear view.

The knee joint should be clean, with the cannon bone a moderate length. The pastern should be medium to long in length. The pastern and hoof should join the leg at a 45 degree angle to the ground. The distance from the elbow to the knee should be longer than from the knee to the ankle.

Back, Loin and Croup: The top line of the walking horse should be level, or slightly sloping to the hindquarters. The back should be short to medium length, with a short, strong loin. The croup should be long with good muscling and a well set tail. The croup should slope moderately from the point of the hip bone to the point of the buttock.

Rear Quarters: The rear quarters should be of moderate thickness and depth, well muscled when viewed from the side and rear. The muscling should be evident inside and out on the rear legs. The hock joint should be fairly wide and deep, with the joint being clean. The cannon area should be vertical from the hock to the pastern, with the pastern showing a 45 degree angle with the ground. *It is acceptable for a walking horse to "stand under in the rear slightly" or to be slightly "cow hocked" or sickle hocked.*

Bones and Legs: The bone of the leg should be flat and free of puffiness or protrusions. The bone should be of adequate substance to support the animal during a strenuous performance. The hock and knee should be wide and deep, clean of puffiness and blended well into the leg. When viewed from the front or rear, a vertical line should bisect the knee and body. The legs below the knee and hocks should show clean tendons, giving the legs a flat appearance. All legs should be set squarely under the body. From the front view, the fore leg should be parallel with the feet pointing straight ahead. From the side view a line drawn perpendicular to the ground should bisect the forearm from the shoulder to the rear of the hoof. From the rear view, the hock should be straight or slightly turned in. The hind legs should set well under the horse and the hooves should point straight forward. The hock should be set at the correct angle *with a straight rear leg being very undesirable. Excessive angle to the hock can cause weak hocks.*

Feet and Pasterns: The hoof should be well shaped and balanced to the size of the horse. The hooves should be tough and durable.

The pastern should be medium to long and set at a 45 degree angle to the ground. A straight short pastern will give a rough ride and predispose the horse to injury.

Quality: Quality is indicated by a cleanness of bone and head, with good body smoothness. The animal's parts should blend well together. The hair coat should be glossy.



Equipment: A Tennessee Walking Horse requires no special equipment. The saddle or bridle is no different from the saddle or bridle used on any other breed. Most often a type of western saddle is used to enjoy the trails but some prefer the flat, cut back English type saddle for recreation and show.

Shoes: Performance show horses of the Tennessee Walking Horse breed are commonly shown with double nailed and triple nailed pads to add dimension to the hoof, provide a sounder base and change certain angles and paths of the motion of the hoof. Pads are an integral part of the training of performance show Tennessee Walking Horses. They serve various functions and, when utilized properly, aid greatly in accentuating the gaits of the show horse. Pads are, essentially, training devices and their effectiveness and usefulness will vary with each individual horse.

The Tennessee Walking Horse that is used for pleasure riding or showing requires no special shoes. On an average the Tennessee Walking Horse will be shod at a slightly lower angle with more natural toe than some of the western type horses. If your horse is shod when you buy it, have your local farrier check the angles, etc. of your horse's shoes at that time, before the horse loses a shoe or its foot grows beyond the desired length and angle. Keep a record of these angles and lengths and have them handy when the farrier shows up.

Feed: The care of your Tennessee Walking Horse is no different from other breeds of horses. All horses must have access to clean drinking water and plenty of feed. You should consult your local veterinarian and feed store operator as to the types of feed most commonly used in your area. The amount of food depends on how your horse will be used and, of course, the horse itself. If the horse is kept in a stall it will require feeding twice a day. An average size horse that is kept in a stall or small lot with no pasture will normally require a gallon of feed in the morning and a gallon of feed in the evening plus all the hay it can eat. All horses need a paddock to be turned out in for free exercise if you are unable to give them the necessary exercise under saddle.



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