

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 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!

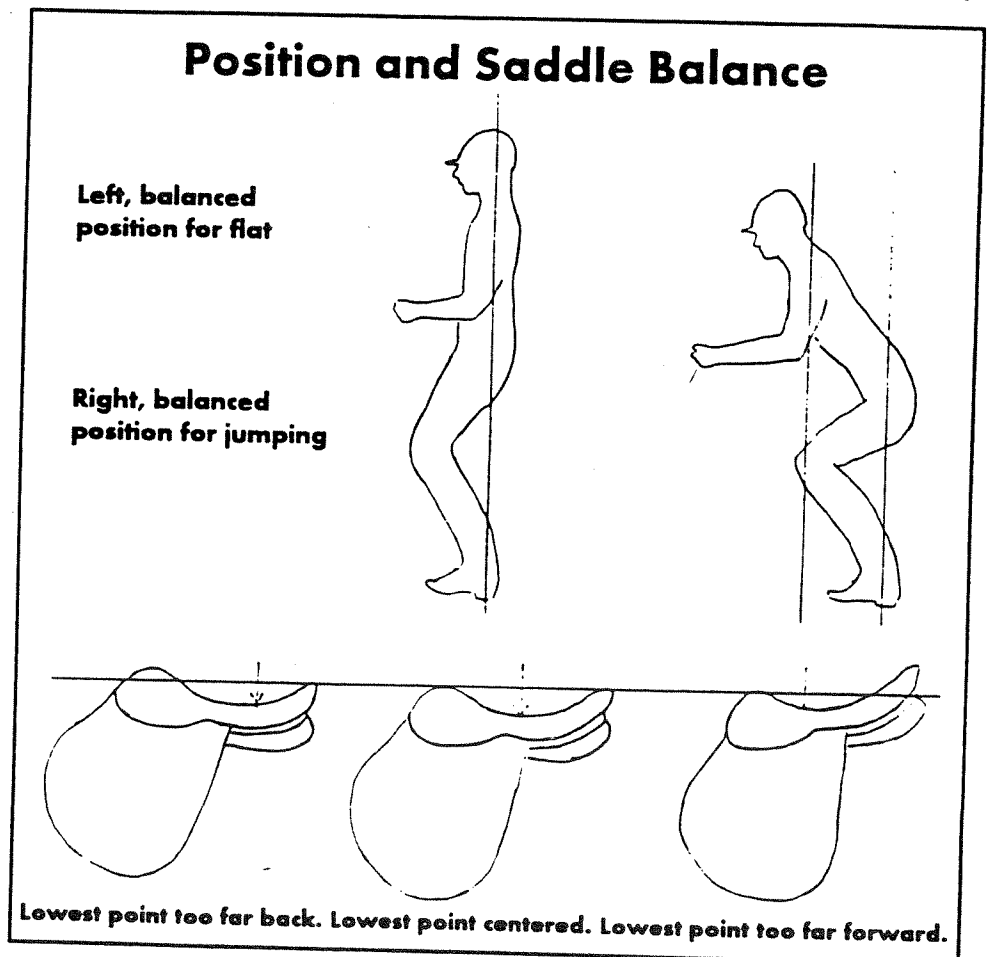
For riding in a balanced position on the flat, the rider should sit on the seat bones, shoulders over hips, head carried erect, arms hanging relaxed from shoulders, elbows at sides and bent allowing forearm and hand to maintain a straight line to the bit. The relaxed leg should lay softly against the 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 horsemanship or safety? Share it. Send a brief article to USPC News.

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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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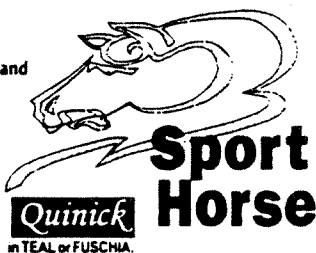
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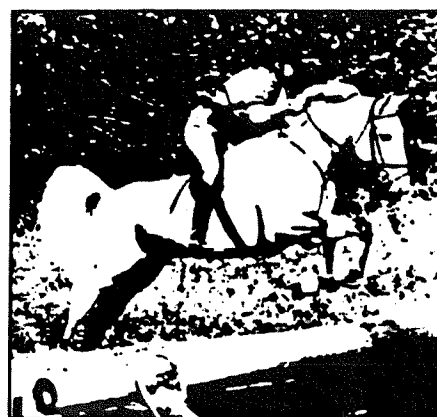
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