

# Rise to the challenge

It may have become second nature, but is your rising trot as effective as it could be? Minette Rice Edwards explains how a few simple exercises can transform your technique – and your horse!



## About Minette

Minette Rice Edwards trains horses and riders up to Grand Prix level for dressage, and also teaches jumping, at Ham House Stables, near Richmond, Surrey. She uses her wealth of experience to help riders gain a clearer understanding of how to make optimum use of their bodies and the effect this has on the horse. "The more advanced this process becomes, the less effort is involved, and the greater the freedom of movement for both horse and rider," says Minette.

## Our models

Andy rides Fern, a 14-year-old Percheron x Arab mare.

**Allow the horse's movement to send you up and out of the saddle. Don't think 'stand up, sit down' pushing your feet against the stirrups but imagine the saddle is a little trampoline**

**R**ising trot is often one of the first things we learn, but it should not be taught until a soft, balanced sitting trot with an independent seat and still hand is achieved. Although rising trot may seem basic and soon become second nature, many of us could do with a few tweaks here and there, which will not only improve our position, but our horse's comfort and his way of going.

**Perfect rising trot**

Can you remember how your instructor first described rising trot to you? Chances are, you were told to stand up in your stirrups, then sit down, stand up, sit down etc. This is the last thing you should do! You should aim to raise and lower your seat in the saddle without it affecting your position and unbalancing the rest of your body.

The key is to concentrate on staying in balance over your legs, with your knees, heels and toes remaining free and steady. Instead of pushing off the stirrup, imagine that you are a puppet with a string attached to the top of your head taking you up. You roll your hips up and forward and then back and down.

Your torso should move as little as possible, and your legs should remain stable. The body should have a slight forward angle as you rise because if you're too upright, you'll lose balance, stiffen your lower back and 'slap back' in the saddle behind the vertical. If you are too far forward, you'll 'flop down' in front of the vertical, which is uncomfortable for the horse and rider! Remember, whenever the head is in front of the body (eg rising trot, forward seat, jumping) you must

counter balance the weight of the head with the weight of the seat.

This may seem a lot to think about for something that seems so basic. Try these exercises on the lunge to get a feel for correct movement. With practice, it will soon become second nature, and your riding and your horse's way of going will improve.

**Exercise 1**

**To get a feel of the rising trot, adopt a forward seat in walk (below). This will exaggerate the angle of the upper body.**

1 To keep your balance, think of kneeling and try not to push down into the stirrups too much  
 1 Keep your legs underneath you – don't stiffen your knees – and let your lower leg hang down in line with your hips

1 As you sit, loosen your ankles to allow the knee to release forward and away over the toe

1 To keep your balance, the lower legs must remain under your body – stable and not swinging. In this position they will also be in place to move the horse forward. Repeat the exercise several times.



**Exercise 2**

**Go rising trot for a few steps, then sit for a few steps, then rise for a few steps, etc. Find the rhythm of the trot – one, two, one, two. It can help to sing a good marching song!**

- 1 Rise from your ankles, knees and hips letting them dance.
- 1 Try not to lose your lower leg position as you rise from and sit back in the saddle
- 1 Andy has a tendency to twist his outside shoulder forward, which can cause the horse to drift outwards. Keep your shoulders parallel to your horse's shoulders.



**Exercise 3**

**Again, in trot...**

- 1 Stand straight up in your stirrups, with your seat right out of the saddle (pictured right). Breathe!
- 1 Without sitting back into the saddle, move straight into a forward seat (below). Bring your hips back as you bend through your knees to hover above the saddle.
- 1 Take rising trot, making sure you fall onto the correct diagonal. If you are in a forward seat, sit as your outside ankle to the circle or bend drops and rise as the inside ankle drops. When adopting sitting trot, feel your horse's hind legs moving underneath you – the outside hind leg will push you out of the saddle for the first beat of your rising trot.

*Training tip...*

Feel your outside seat bone drop as your horse's outside hind leg comes forward, then let the thrust of that hind leg push you up.



To fall onto the **correct diagonal**, adopt sitting trot and **feel your horse's hind legs** underneath you



## Exercise 4

**This is a great exercise for freeing up your hips. Cross your stirrups in front of you and pick up trot...**

- 1 Gently rise to the trot without stirrups (below) – it may seem hard at first, but remember to breathe and not to hunch your shoulders and back. Don't rise too high.
- 1 Pretend you are on a beach ball. Let your hips roll up and back.
- 1 Try not to grip with your thighs, and remember your diagonals!

## Quick trick

Take your stirrups back and adopt rising trot. As you are trotting around, place your knuckles on top of your horse's withers and keep your arms loose. A common fault is to stiffen the shoulders, arms and elbows, but this exercise helps release excess tension and balance over your legs. After a few circuits, bend the elbows and bring the hands back to normal riding position. Keep this soft feeling, loosening your arms through heavy elbows.



## Training tip...

Try to 'feel' the correct diagonal through your seatbones, instead of looking down at your horse's shoulders.

Rising without stirrups will teach you not to rely on your stirrups for balance



## In a nutshell

Keep this checklist in the back of your mind to perfect your rising trot...

- 1 **Soft arms** Your elbows should remain heavy and fluid
- 1 **Loose hips** Roll them forward to rise out of the saddle
- 1 **Loose thighs** Resist the desire to grip!
- 1 **Release your knees** as you rise out of and sit back in the saddle
- 1 **Still lower leg** underneath your body for balance
- 1 **Loose ankles** Allow your knees to go forward over your toes
- 1 **Rise from free joints** Swing your hips

forward and let your horse's movement push you out of the saddle

- 1 **Sit softly** to avoid hurting your horse's back – and breathe!
- 1 **Rise to the trot** with a regular rhythm. Slow the rhythm if the horse hurries, and increase the energy if it's too slow.

## Next month...

Minette explains bend, and demonstrates a few simple exercises that'll have you riding perfect turns and circles.

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