



5 Rookie Mistakes with Gaited Horses

By Gaye DeRusso

Gaited horses are not as easy to ride as it looks. These rookie moves can affect your efforts to effectively control and safely enjoy your horse.

1. Buying a gaited horse, without ever riding one before. Just because someone says they are calm and smooth, does not mean it is the right horse for you. It is best to go try different gaited horses before deciding on buying one. Make sure you like how the gait feels, make sure the speed they walk at, will match who you will be riding with. Have the trainer or owner show you how to get the gait and keep it in gait. Ride it similar to where you will ride it at home.
2. Believing they all just gait perfectly. Some do, but many do not. The rider must be an active rider and have good feel and timing to keep the horse in the gait and at the right speed. If you just want to be a passenger and not learn anything new, then best to stick with trotting horse breeds and not go gaited.
3. Riding too fast. Everyone seems to think gaited horses are just suppose to go super-fast. That's like saying all trotting horses should gallop all the time just because they can. The gaits are usually slower than most people think. A flat walk is 3-5 miles per hour. Many people can walk 3 mph. So, it is not that fast. A running walk or saddle gait or fox trot is about 5-10 mph. but each horse is different, and some will be at the slower end and some at the faster end. But if you ride them too fast, past their gait, your gaited horse will most likely trot or pace. That's why they say don't sacrifice the gait for speed.
4. Not taking any horseback riding lessons before you get a gaited horse. Just because you have ridden some trail horses on vacation, does not mean you know how to ride. And just because gaited horses are smooth, doesn't mean you won't fall off. You will need someone to teach you how to balance your body, control the horse in all different situations and safely ride it. A good instructor and trainer can make the biggest difference in your knowledge of horses but also keep you safe around them and help you to avoid many dangerous mistakes.
5. Thinking you ride them the same as a trotting horse, but they just do some extra gaits. The more you are around gaited horses, you will see how each one gaits differently, has different speeds and you sometimes must ride them differently to get the correct gait even when they are the same breed. The more you learn before you purchase one the better you will be prepared. Talk with people who own them and ask them what they like and do not like about gaited horses. You might be surprised what you will learn from them.