

TEMPO

Tempo is defined as the rate of repetition of the footfall, or in other words, the number of strides or beats per minute. As the tempo gets faster, the number of strides per minute increases.

The tempo in which we move is for the most part dependent on our innate speed. Certain people move quickly regardless of what they are doing, whereas others feel more comfortable working in a slower tempo. This also applies to the horse. It is very important that we study our horses when they move, and pay attention to their innate tempo.

Sometimes the horse's and the rider's tempo are in such disharmony that it is impossible to achieve good results. ***Total harmony can only be achieved when horse and rider work in the same tempo.*** If the horse and the rider work in different tempos, it is like two people speaking to each other in different languages—neither one understands the other.

It is possible that, with some patience, the rider can adapt to the horse's tempo, and with beginners this would be our goal, but more advanced riders can change the tempo. It is extremely important that the horse works in a tempo that is steady and that the rider has control over the tempo. To be in control of the tempo, the rider must be able to ask the horse to change the tempo in which he is working at any moment. It is important to teach the horse to follow the tempo defined by the rider's driving seat aids.

Practice changes of tempo often, especially at the trot. Influence the horse by the way you use your seat, asking for some steps in a slower tempo followed by some at a quicker tempo, but ***without changing the speed.*** In other words, quicken the tempo by increasing the number of steps per minute without moving faster over the ground. Practicing changes of tempo encourages the horse to pay more attention to your driving seat aids, and helps you find the tempo that suits your horse the best. Changes of tempo also have a very good suppling effect, help to develop the horse's gaits, and provide interest, avoiding monotony.

The horse can move in his own natural tempo only when he moves freely in a relaxed manner, or under a rider who is in total balance.

The rider must be able to slow the horse's speed and tempo enough to allow him to follow the horse. The horse should allow the rider into his tempo. Half-halts, transitions, shoulder-in and work on curved lines and circles are good exercises to help control the tempo.

It is important to understand that a horse who works in too quick a tempo will not be able to

develop and improve his gaits. He will be tense, his muscles will be tight, and it will be impossible to supple him. In order to develop and improve the gaits, the rider must feel that the horse is working in a tempo that allows the rider to drive the horse forward. When this is the case, the rider will feel that he is in synchrony with his horse, making it possible for horse and rider to work together in harmony.

On the other hand, a horse that works in a tempo that is too slow lacks energy. And though the rider will never lose the quality of the gates, balance or straightness in this case, since the rider will be forced to drive the horse forward all the time, a horse with a very slow tempo will be limited in his education. There just won't be energy enough for the more upper level movements.