

# Saddle Seat

## POSITION OF RIDER

### Refer to Current USEF/EC Rules

**Legs and Feet:** The old days of the flared lower leg and the cocked ankle are long gone. It is easy to see why, as this unnatural leg and foot position did not allow the rider to properly guide the horse using calf pressure. With feet in stirrups, the stirrup leathers should hang straight down, should never be twisted and should be even on both sides. With feet out of stirrups and relaxed, proper length of irons may be determined by finding the point at which the stirrup touches the inside anklebone. A good rule of thumb is that the stirrup should hit close to, or just below, the ankle bone depending on the length of the rider's leg.

**Maintaining center of balance:** Rider's back should be straight, with shoulders directly over hips and spine in line with that of horse. Leaning down over horse to check leads and/or diagonals should be severely penalized. Ideally, a rider should be able to feel the correct lead and diagonals, but if they must be checked, only a glance downward with the eyes is appropriate. However, a rider who leans over and obtains a correct lead or diagonal should be scored above a rider who glances down but obtains and maintains an incorrect lead or diagonal.

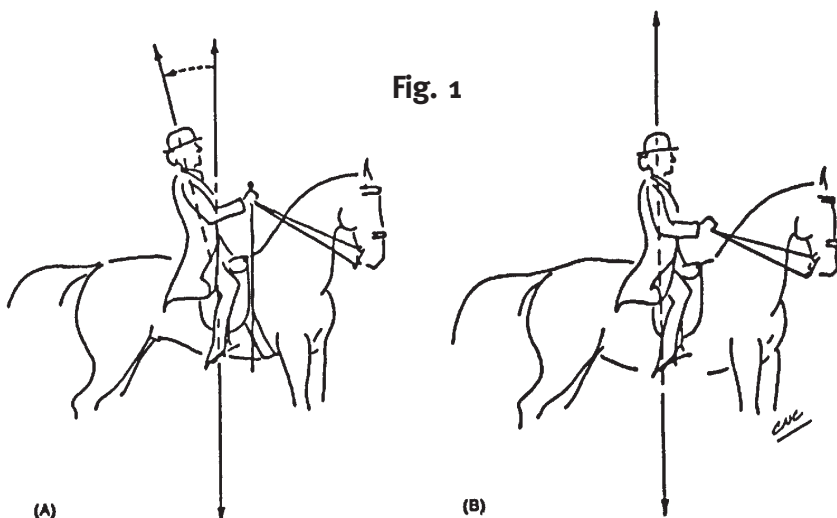
**Hands:** Hands should be quiet and light, with flexible (not locked) wrists and should show sympathy, adaptability and control. Horses with high-set necks allow the rider's hands to be held higher than do horses with low-set necks; therefore, the placement of the horse's neck dictates the proper elevation of the rider's hands. Hands should be tipped in 30-45 degrees from vertical and should not be excessively far apart (not more than 8 inches in most cases). Bight of reins is on off (right) side. Constant bumping of the horse's mouth or excessive shortening of the reins is distracting and should be avoided.

**Arms:** Elbows should be no further from the body than the point at which the chest begins to look concave. Improper roundness of the arms forces the chest to cave inward and the shoulders to come forward out of position. The upper body, including the arms and hands, should give the appearance of elegant style and complete control but without the impression of stiffness, posing or exaggeration.

Exhibitors are reminded to always refer to current *USEF/EC Rule Books* for specific rules regarding Saddle Seat position and suitability. Exhibitors are reminded to refer to the current *AHA Handbook* for procedures.

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**Fig. 1**

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A common distortion in saddle seat equitation (A). Correct position (B).

**Fig. 2**

Rider has rolled shoulders forward, causing chest to concave — resulting in stiffness in neck area, restricted use of upper back and rigidity in arms and wrists. This creates extra stress on the lower back and waist, as the upper body now must rely on the reins to maintain balance.



**Fig. 2**

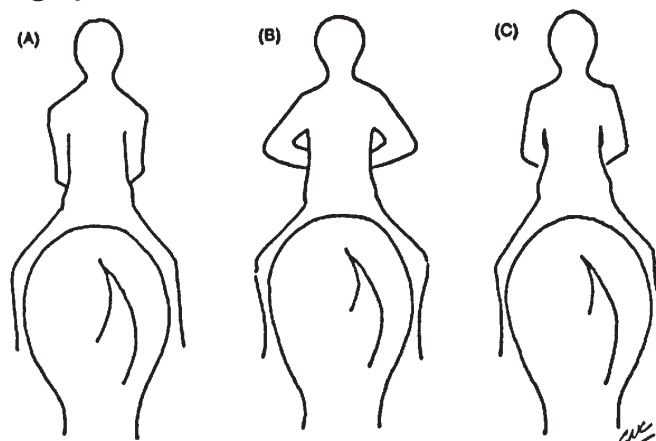
**Fig. 4**

Elbows.

- (A) Pinched in, pressed downward from shoulder—stiffens entire back, neck, and shoulders.
- (B) Out, causes balance to come from arms; stiffens shoulders, neck and hands brace on horse's mouth.
- (C) Natural-related, comfortable, resting easily at rider's side.

*Drawings courtesy of Craig Christiansen*

**Fig. 4**



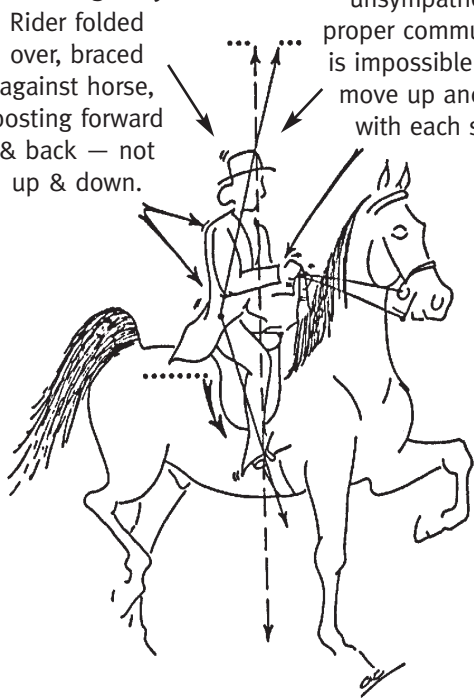
**Fig. 3**

**False center of gravity.**

Hands and arms tensed, braced against the bits, wrists stiff & unsympathetic — proper communication is impossible—hands move up and down with each stride.

**Center of gravity.**

Rider folded over, braced against horse, posting forward & back — not up & down.



Incorrect saddle seat (rider behind motion of horse)