

ARE YOUR SEATBONES FORWARD? A TEST

By Lynne Sprinsky

*(The author gratefully acknowledges the teacher from whom she learned this valuable lesson,
Susan Terrall of Rutherfordton, NC, a.k.a. "Horseperson")*

The classical European tradition of horsemanship requires that the rider's seatbones be pointing forward when mounted. The forward-pointing seat bones exert a subtle but decisive influence on the horse, which says to him, "Go forward." Learning to ride "off the seat," or, put another way, having the horse "at the seat," so that soft, invisible aids are immediately heard by the horse, comprehended, and responded to, requires that the rider learn to sit in such a way that the seat bones point forward.

This brief article gives a simple test to determine whether a rider's seat bones are, in fact, at the correct angle in the saddle. The test requires a second person to execute.

Instructions

Mount up as usual and sit as you conventionally do. Yield your reins to your ground person.

Have your ground person stand at the horse's shoulder (either side, doesn't matter) and face you. The ground person takes the reins, one in each hand, and "pretends" to be the horse. You, the rider, pick up the other end at the buckle, but hold them as you would normally do.

Now have the ground person simulate the bascule of the horse's neck and walk or canter – precise duplication isn't necessary – by moving the reins towards you and away from you in a rhythmic fashion, while you (the rider) follow the motion just as you would if you have a contact with your horse's mouth. Needless to say, there needs to be enough slack in the rein behind the ground person, between his/her back and the horse's mouth, so that the horse feels none of this or the following.

Before beginning, instruct your ground person that at some point, WITHOUT GIVING YOU ANY WARNING, they should snatch or jerk the reins towards themselves (and away from you) . This motion simulates a horse "rooting" at the reins.

The Test

PASS: Your seatbones are pulled deeper into the horse's back.

FAIL: You tip forward off your seat bones. This shows that your seat bones weren't really FORWARD.

Important Additional Comments

If you "failed the test," experiment with various pelvic tilts until you find one where you can pass it!

Then try to memorize that feeling. BUT REMEMBER THESE OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS!

1.) Your front line (crotch to chin) must be lifted and broadened. Imagine that your front line is a pair of French doors opening on a beautiful meadow.

2.) Your shoulders must be back and down. Aim ultimately so that, seen from the side, only the upper portion of your arms can be seen, and none of your scapula (shoulder blades). This necessitates working on your posture 24/7.

Computer Slump is Enemy Number One!

3.) Your back may not be arched or roached, but must be as flat as possible.

Practice sliding down a wall this way:

Stand with your heels against a smooth surface, and then bend your knees and slide your back down the wall, focussing on meeting the wall with the small of your back and eliminating the hollow place that would normally be there.

4.) An interesting twist for the sliding-down-the-wall exercise, which I learned from trainer/instructor and judge Paula Kierkegaard, is to have a friend stand in front of you, holding your hand so that your fingers are cupped in each others palms but your respective elbows face in opposite directions. Have the friend do a deep knee bend with

you, going down as you go down. If you take a firmer grip of her or pull on her, you are likely to do the same with the reins and will need to strengthen your abs and back muscles in order NOT to balance off your horse's mouth.

5.) Your upper arm must hang vertically out of your arm sockets, and your elbow should be bent and "pointy" and hang just above your hip bones. Carrying the upper arm forward of the trunk rather than parallel to it UNDOES the forward pointing seat bones because it makes you collapse your front line to varying degrees. Carrying the arms properly allows the circle of the aids to remain unbroken so that energy that is generated in the hindquarters and travels through the back, up through your seat bones, to the small of your back where your elbows are anchored, and then in a straight line directly to the soft, receiving hand, where (absent any blockage) it is recycled to the hind legs.