

Overstride is an Illusion!

by Anita Howe

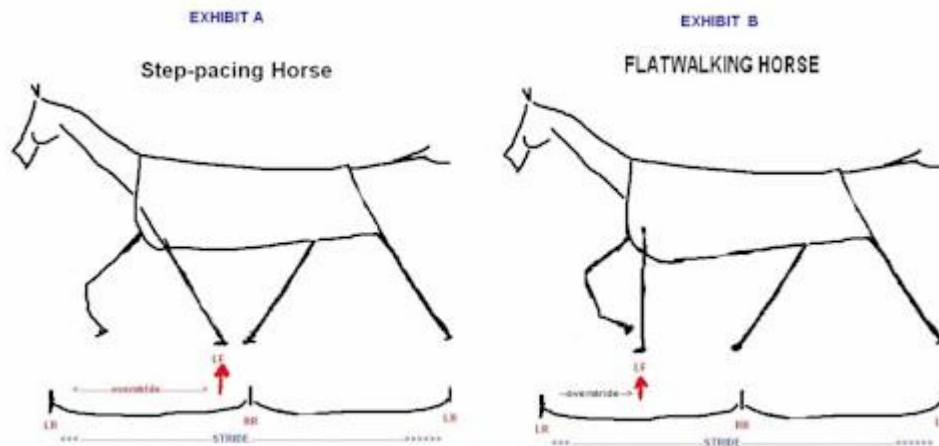
We all hear walking horse people frequently remark on what *huge* overstride on this horse or that one as they watch them gait along. When I hear these comments I itch to step in and ask them exactly what that means to them and how they feel it relates to actual stride. What I say here may surprise many of you because it doesn't appear to be common knowledge in the TWH world, or at least not willingly admitted.

Most people, if asked, would respond that gaiting overstride is an indicator of how long-strided a horse is. That it is an accurate gauge of a horse's actual stride length. What they either don't realize (or won't admit) is that overstride will only be accurate gauge for stride when comparing horses with exactly the same footfall timing, which we all know is often quite rare in gaited horses.

Let's break it down: if you have a horse that's more *lateral* (pacing or step-pacing) *in his timing*, that horse will consistently show greater overstride than a more evenly timed horse *with exactly the same amount of stride*. *Pacers will consistently show more overstride than more evenly timed horses with the exact same actual stride length.* So using overstride as a tool to gauge actual stride will always be inaccurate for comparisons. Overstride can still tell us that a horse has nice stride and is reaching well underneath himself. But if longer stride is the goal, then overstride should not be used for comparing stride between horses. It is totally misleading, and often successfully used to fool people into believing a horse has more real stride than he actually has. Forcing a horse into a more lateral timing could be used to fool others into believing that the horse has more actual stride than he truly has.

I have created a diagram below to illustrate this assertion. Please excuse my poor artwork; I make no pretensions to artistic ability. I have drawn stick horses, but they can serve as adequate illustration. Please note that the head, body and rear end of both horses are duplicated, I've only changed the placement of the front feet and front legs as illustration of the timing differences. The more lateral horse lifts his legs on the same side of the body *together* for their forward motion. The evenly timed horse will have his front feet both in absolute mid-stride (hooves directly below the point of the shoulder) as the rear feet are at their point of weight transfer. I then extrapolated the *future* placement of the left rear hoof on both horse diagrams by doubling the forward distance between the hind hooves at this point. It is safe to say that the left hoof will reach as far in front of the right

hoof as that right hoof reaches ahead of the left. From there it is a simple comparison of where the left rear will overstride the placement of the left front. Because the horses are the same drawing and the rear strides are also the same we know that they are striding exactly the same distance and the only difference is a change in the front hoof placement. This allows us to determine how much overstride is created by the same stride with different timing. The small arrows indicate the left front hoof prints of the corresponding hoof placements, and we can all see the resulting overstride change.



It is plain to see the difference in overstride is very dramatic between two horses with the same actual stride length. Once you visualize this alteration of overstride it is easy to understand that *the more lateral a horse's timing the more overstride that will be produced from that stride*. Please remember that it does *not* produce any greater stride length, only more overstride. Could this be just one more reason the traditional TN breeding practices push the pace and the step-pace as a preferred gait or timing? I submit that it just might be; to foster the illusion of more stride by pointing to a misleading overstride. There is also the added factor that a hard pacing horse will suspend between his hoof placements as well, which further distorts the overstride measurement. But that discussion is for another time.

If it's all about stride then we need to bring our focus back to how much *actual* stride a horse has, and the only sure method is measuring from where a hoof lifts off to the point where that same hoof places again. If stride is an important consideration for you, don't be fooled by misleading overstride into thinking that a horse is striding bigger than he really is.

Actual stride measurements will vary greatly in this breed. A prominent trainer of the 1940's, Jack Slayden, once remarked that a good horse will "carry a running-walk of 10 to 12 mph, going square, ... with reach in front of

100 to 120 inches from where they pick up a front foot until they put it down again"⁽¹⁾. That's between 9 and 10 feet for those of us mathematically challenged. Of course all horses won't produce this huge stride, and there are many uses that such a huge stride will be less than ideal for. But if you *are* judging stride, be sure of what you're looking at; the actual stride length, whether it's the front hoof or the back (one cannot go any further than the other on the same horse). After all, other gaited horses may have the ability to be trained to a running walk, but it's the huge stride of the walking horses that help define their unique way of going. So don't be sidetracked from what you really want to see.

(1) Bob Womack, "The Echo of Hoofbeats", third edition, copyright © 1994