

## Foot Timing and Athleticism

People who ride horses have a leg-up when it comes to evaluating dogs in motion. They are not any more intelligent but while we all learn through our eyes, ears, and hands, horse people can learn by the seat of their pants. On horseback, you can feel correct gait through the saddle. You learn to recognize the feel of a correct trot, gallop, and for some the rack, which is a four beat gait. From the back of a horse, you can't see the gait but you sure can feel the gait, and an inefficient trot is apparent by your contact with the saddle.

Foot timing in dogs is extremely important. An efficient gait means that the dog covers ground with the best use of energy. This is really a study in kinesiology, how muscles move in motion. There is no way we can ride a dog, but we can feel the dog's movement through the lead, and certainly we can see correct foot timing on the side. Foot timing is the efficient balance in front and rear movement, and the strike of the foot on the ground. Proper foot timing not only comes from correct conformation, but also from muscle conditioning and coordination. Not all dogs have the same coordination, just like humans. Conditioning can help with coordination, but it can't improve conformation. Conditioning can improve muscling, although it can't improve a dog's angulation.

Usia Bolt, Gold Medalist and the world record holder in the 100 meter not only has perfect foot timing, but the muscle and athleticism to run a phenomenal race -- not to mention the conditioning to pull off his historic win. When you watch him run, you can see there is something extra he gets out each step with unbelievable efficiency.

A dog with proper foot timing is fluid and efficient. Front and rear are balanced with reach and drive in proper proportions to cover ground with the least amount of energy. Some dogs may change with age, just as a gangly teenage runner matures to a champion when the muscles and conditioning catch up to the development of bones and ligaments. A younger dog may have looser ligaments that allow for more elastic movement, but it takes a combination of muscle development and conditioning to get it all together in one package.

Recognizing proper movement is not always easy. Some people can see it, and some have a hard time visualizing foot timing. Just like watching Usia when you see it once you should be able to recognize again. In the case of horse people you have an advantage because you can feel correct movement. Some people learn by touch, some learn best by sight. Others learn by the seat of their pants, literally. As a matter of fact, I've been told that some of my ideas appear to have come from the seat of my pants.

Which ever way you evaluate movement, the ability to assess foot timing is essential to bettering your understanding of correct canine movement. From a breeders standpoint, it is essential to understand how conformation, coordination and conditioning all combine together to produce an athletic champion.

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