



What makes your Icelandic tick

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Icelandic horses....have fun riding your gaited horse and find out what makes your horse tick.

While teaching people on these quirky, quick and incredibly proud horses, the breed grew on me. I noticed they often bring their own fun with them into the arena. They are brilliant and often are a step ahead of the handler or rider.



Icelandic horses are extremely level-headed, not spooky and just move calmly into a direction where they would like to go.

These horses have their own ideas on how they like to be ridden. Some suggestions (of the horse) could be: rein changes, to look over here and check out who just arrived, making themselves be known – “look at me, I’m in the arena” or choosing the gait, they would prefer to be worked in.

The funniest thing I have seen was a cheeky horse that stood next to the mounting block and waiting for the rider to dismount. Cheeky and comical or sometimes extremely frustrating.

So, when riding these horses, you as the rider should have a clear head and focus on the situation at hand. Insist without being demanding; it is a two-way conversation.

For me, it always starts with a balanced, centred seat. Evenly placed on top of the horse, relaxed through the hip and nicely centred above. So, when your horse starts moving you about, with little corrections, you can rebalance your horse.

Here are a few tips:

When you ride a proud horse, and someone enters the arena or walks past you:

Give your horse a job to do; this can be anything from riding patterns to laterals, to tempo or gait changes. So, the focus is on you be creative

One of the main challenges when riding Icelandic horses is to work on clean gaits - walk, trot, tölt and canter.

In the walk, feel the rhythm, count the strides don’t rush it. Icelandic horses are often a bit narrow in the chest, so riding a square pattern instead of circles helps them to open up the chest.

Riding a square opens up the outside shoulder a bit to help create the room.

Riding the corners in travers (Travers definition: a movement performed in dressage, in which the horse moves parallel to the side of the arena, with its shoulders carried closer to the wall than its hindquarters and its body curved towards the centre) or

Riding the corners as a few steps of pirouette (Definition: A pirouette is a two-track lateral movement asked of a horse in dressage, in which the animal makes a circle with its front end around a smaller circle made by the hind end), keeping the hindleg engaged and stepping one stride at the time.



Changing Rein:

- It is beneficial when changing the rein to maybe come to a halt and balance your horse in the halt. Then step into the new direction. You will feel after a while, that your horse is ready for the change and smoothly goes in both directions. Neither drifting out one way or drifting in the other.
- Turn towards the arena wall if they like to cut corners - ride a small circle into the outside of the corner.
- Use the wall, so they have to move and lift the shoulder and straighten up.
- Think about exercises that help you to align your horse.
- Change direction often.

Trot:

Going towards trot some Icelandic horses have such a beautiful tölt that they don't feel the need to bother with the trot. But it helps to work on the trot as you will notice that you can work more efficiently on even hind legs and your tölt is improving.

- I find it very useful to place your hands a bit closer together, evenly over the withers. Stay centred in your seat and encourage your horse to trot by rising into the trot. Creating the room for the trot and creating a rhythm.
- Some Icelandic horses find this easier to pick up if you give them step by step guidance. As a rider with good core engagement and balance, you also notice when they shift you more to one side then the other. You can pick the striking off hindleg to help your horse along. Having your hands placed over the wither helps to maintain the balance and not using the reins for balance just a soft communication.

*Enjoy
the ride!*

Tölt:

Yes, your horse can tölt, and it is a fun gait! So, let's make it enjoyable for both parties. Balance is over your seat soft and relaxed and not on the reins. The reins are there for communication and conversation with your horse.

- The tölt is closely related to the walk. Play around with the horse's energy.
- They have to be quicker with the hind legs, so you have to use your calves just behind the knee and be soft and supple in your seat to let the energy flow.
- To avoid tension and stiffening of the horse's back when it tries to build up strength to execute the movement of the tölt, the rider needs to be flexible in the hips and have a good core strength to be an easy load to carry.
- There should be softness in the rein to avoid using it to keep yourself as the rider balanced. The rider should be balanced without pulling on the horse's mouth.



Grounding yourself as a rider:

This is where the core engagement comes in and you are an easy load to carry,

- Ground and balance yourself lengthwise - from toe to ear, staying supple and elastic. We all know the feeling of losing a stirrup. When the horse rolled us out of the seat left to right.
- The same goes for the balance from front to back, when the horse dropped the wither and we tilt forward like a puppet.
- Suppleness from soft ankles, knees, hips, elbows and shoulders.
- Chin up this is a fun ride! Look proud! Achieve the last little bit of length being by sitting proud and tall and able to breath.

