

July 2021 - Dropping Stirrups

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Learning to ride without stirrups is a huge confidence builder as a rider. It's a way to gain a deeper seat and better balance through your seat without squeezing your thighs or legs.

When you first start to ride, you want a shorter stirrup so you have a tighter leg. But as you get to be a better rider, you want to elongate your leg so you can sit deeper in the saddle to get a full swing and more use of your leg and foot. That's true whether you are riding English or western events. Riding without stirrups will help you achieve that.

It also helps your confidence and skill if you lose your stirrup or stirrups in a class or in a maneuver. With or without your stirrups, you know how to maintain your balance as a rider.

To practice riding without stirrups, you can cross your stirrups over your horse's withers so they don't flop around and hit your foot. You do that also in a class if the judge calls for an entire pattern to be ridden without stirrups. If you are asked to drop your stirrups on the rail or if you are asked to do only part of a pattern without them, don't cross them over.



Troubleshooting Dropped Stirrups

When you drop – or lose – your stirrups, one big problem can be picking them back up - especially with an English stirrup. When a rider cannot pick up a stirrup, it's usually because she is lifting her leg as she tries to pick up the stirrup, bending the knee.

In a western saddle, you can lift your leg up to pick up your stirrup because that nice, big, thick western fender of leather keeps the stirrup in place.

But put a rider in an English saddle with that little-bitty stirrup leather, and if she lifts her leg, it

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releases the stirrup leather and the stirrup moves around.

To do it right, keep your leg in the correct position and just move your ankle. When you drop a stirrup, you have to turn your toe out and let the stirrup out. When you pick it up, you simply turn your toe in, grab the stirrup with your toe and wiggle it into position at the ball of your foot.

If you feel like you are losing your balance, a common instinct is to squeeze or grip with your legs. But when you do that, it pushes your weight upward and you'll have a harder time maintaining your balance. Instead, lengthen your leg.

Rider's Tip

If you want to be a better western rider in dropping and picking up your stirrup, put yourself in an English saddle and that will really teach you the art of picking up your stirrups without changing your leg position.

How To

As a beginner riding without stirrups for the first few times, you should probably work on a longe line with an experienced person helping you.

Begin by dropping and picking up your stirrups while standing still at least five times after you mount. Do this in an arena without looking down or using your hand to help your foot find the stirrup.

Then, graduate to dropping and picking up the stirrups at a walk. When you can do that, progress to the sitting trot, posting trot and then the canter.

For a fun training exercise in dropping your stirrups and picking them back up, try this: Ride a figure 8, but not a lazy 8 – it's more like two circles with a straight line in the middle. Drop your stirrups at the center of the figure eight and ride one circle without them, then pick them up again at the middle to ride the next circle with your stirrups.

Or to really challenge yourself, drop your stirrups at the center line and pick them up at the first quarter of the circle, drop them again at the half-circle mark, then pick them up at the three-quarter-circle mark and then drop them at the center line again.

Another variation would be to pick up your stirrups or drop them every five strides. Count out loud as you do it. When you get this down, you know you have it mastered.

Start all of these at the walk, then progress to the sitting trot, the posting trot and the canter. Make sure your circles are fairly large – at least 70 feet in diameter or larger.