



Level 3 Assessments Gaited Horses

Phone 800-642-3335 • Fax 888-731-9722 or 970-731-9722 • PO Box 3729, Pagosa Springs, Colorado 81147 • www.parelli.com

Here is an update on the topic of gaited horses in the Parelli Program and especially in Level 3. Included in this update we have also quoted Carol Coppinger and David Lichman, two Parelli Instructors who have lots of experience with this topic. Carol and David are great resources for Parelli Students with gaited horses.

I AM AT THE BEGINNING OF MY PARELLI JOURNEY. SHOULD I USE A GAITED HORSE FOR THE STUDY OF LEVELS 1, 2 AND 3?

It depends on your goals.

If you want to build a lasting partnership with your gaited horse and help him to be the best horse he can be, then taking him or her through Levels 1 and 2 is a great idea. You can even go through Level 3 and 4 skills, just omitting the trotting tasks (some of which you can do at gait) and the flying lead changes.

On the other hand if your goal is to pass ALL of Level 3 and/or to become a Parelli Professional, then you might want to give serious consideration to using a trotting horse for your study of the Levels and allowing your gaited horse to be a longer term project.

Bringing a gaited horse through Level 3 is a specialization best tackled after YOU have passed Level 3 on an easier horse. It's possible to get to level 3 with a gaited horse, but much more challenging—it makes a great Level 4 project. The foundation—Levels 1, 2 and 3 with a non-gaited horse—would ideally come first.

WHAT IF I ALREADY HAVE A GAITED HORSE AND I HAVE COME ALL THE WAY TO LEVEL 3 ALREADY? CAN I SUBMIT MOST OF THE LEVEL 3 ASSESSMENT WITH MY GAITED HORSE, AND SUBSTITUTE A DIFFERENT (NON-GAITED) HORSE FOR THE TROTGING AND CANTERING PARTS?

Our preference is for students to submit all of Level 3 (or any Level) with the same horse throughout, so that we can see that the student has developed the savvy to be able to develop their horse in every area rather than switching horses when a particular task or savvy presents a challenge.

Exceptions to this are possible on a case by case basis. If you have a gaited horse who does not easily trot or canter, we don't want you to force the issue.

For a student who has a gaited horse for a Level 3 assessment the approximate guidelines would be:
We need to see the tasks that ask for trot or canter, done at a trot or canter. Within reason, it is possible to submit most of the test with your gaited horse, and substitute a trotting/cantering horse for the tasks that call for a trot canter.

For students who are assessing Level 3, write to assessments@parelli.com, and check with us on your individual situation. For those assessing Levels 1 and 2, it would be up to the Instructor doing the Assessment.



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Gaited Horses Continued

Carol Coppinger, 4-Star Parelli Instructor:

I also have gaited horses and during my journey through Levels 1, 2 and 3, I was bound and determined to do EVERYTHING with my gaited horses! However, when I started playing in Level 3 I soon realized I was asking my horses to do things that were not exactly what they were designed for. I realized that the more I tried to do the Level 3 trotting and cantering tasks, the more I started to make them feel wrong for just being what they were—"gaited."

During this time I realized that in order to teach my horses to do things that were above and beyond their skills, I needed to be good at those skills, myself, first.

So, I leased/borrowed and did everything I could to learn the skills I needed to teach my horses to trot and canter, WITHOUT forcing them. I soon had more understanding why the levels program was not about needing a "special" program for gaited horses, it was about understanding all horses. And for me with my goals to be an Instructor it was even more important that I be well rounded with any breed of horse.

So can a gaited horse do Level 3? If your gaited horse can walk, trot, canter in addition to his special skills of gaiting you should be able to do Level 3. It may take you a bit longer and how much longer I cannot say since you have more gaits to understand and be in control of but I sure won't say it is impossible.

David Lichman, 5 Star Parelli Instructor:

Here is the problem in a nutshell: If your horse is strongly gaited, when she trots it may not be a pure trot. Cantering is even more problematic. Dedicated students can usually teach their gaited horses to canter, even if it doesn't come that naturally to them, but the flying changes are an extreme request. The horse has so many ways to organize her feet, that switching from one exact 3-beat canter lead to the other without wandering through a "series of unfortunate gaits" is nearly impossible.

I have as much experience with gaited horses as anyone in this program, and although I am sure it can be done, I have yet to complete the soft, relaxed, collected flying lead changes we'd like to see at Level 3 with a gaited horse—it's just not that important to me. I've had several students bound and determined to get it, only to give up—sometimes years later—and complete the task on a trotting horse.

There is so much more to building a great relationship with your gaited horse than these few tasks in Level 3. Take all that Pat has to offer; teach your gaited horse to ride bridleless. You can do simple lead changes, and eventually do them without bridle or saddle. You can do amazing things at Liberty (check out Carol's scores with Ranger in the Parelli Games!) Enjoy her for what she is, and if you want to learn about trotting half-passes and finesse flying lead changes—there's another horse out there ready to be your teacher.

If you are reading this you are probably already familiar with my educational material, but if not, there is a ton of information on how Pat's program applies to gaited horses there. Check out *Gaited Horses, Naturally!* on my web site: www.DavidLichman.com.