



Three Gaits, Inc.

Therapeutic Horsemanship Center

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Three Gaits' Horse Selection Guidelines

It would be impossible for Three Gaits to provide any equine activities without the generosity of the many people who have shared their horses. As valued members of the team, Three Gaits' horses' happiness and well-being is our priority. These guidelines for evaluating prospective horses help us select horses that are well-suited to their job at Three Gaits. Our "best" program horses have had the following factors in common:

Between 8-18 years old

We will accept horses older and younger than this, depending upon the horse's training, health and condition. We invest a lot of time and energy into training our horses, and we want our program horses to be able to work happily at Three Gaits for many years to come.

Sound in all four legs and healthy

Unsound horses aren't safe or happy, and may display unpredictable behavior. In therapeutic riding or hippotherapy, soundness is extremely important to provide rhythmical, cadenced and free-moving gaits. Any unevenness in a horse's gait can be magnified for a rider with a disability – and can actually cause a negative effect. A horse with an unbalanced stride could cause our riders discomfort or to lose their balance.

Horses must not have any chronic vision conditions, respiratory problems or other on-going health issues that require expensive ongoing medication or treatment, and/or limit their ability to provide a safe activity for our riders.

Horses with limited use, such as only ridden by children, or only at the walk with limited trotting; or only for grooming, aren't able to best serve the diverse needs and skills of our riders. We have students that do ride at all three gaits. Three Gaits strives to provide that experience and level of challenge for our riders.

Horses who enjoy being around people and other horses

Three Gaits' horses are not asked to work for more than a total of four classes per day, and never more than three classes in a row. (Most of our classes are 30 minutes long.) Horses have at least one day off each week. Over the course of a day, horses are exposed to a variety of people. They may be handled by volunteers, riders and staff at Three Gaits. During classes a horse may have a leader and up to two people walking alongside the horse in addition to a rider.

Our horses must be good citizens when ridden in groups with no kicking or aggressive behavior toward other horses in lessons or the pastures. When a horse is in a lesson or being groomed, it must be willing to have other horses approach it and move away. In addition, they must be safe when turned out with other horses (no mounting or "studdish" behavior, and no excessive aggression toward other horses). We turn our horses out in groups – so overly aggressive horses or horses that don't respect electric fence aren't good candidates.

Horses have been well-trained and consistently worked with throughout their lives

There are no requirements for the discipline in which the horse is trained. Successful horses have been shown in western pleasure, dressage or over fences; worked as lesson horses, and others have been used as pony club or 4-

H mounts, as polo horses or field hunters. The common factor is that they have been consistently worked and have a “take it all in stride” attitude.

Almost any breed of horse can be used; horses that are between 14-16 hands and with sturdy enough builds to carry an adult are ideal

Starting the Assessment Process

If you have or know of a horse that you think may be suitable for Three Gaits, please contact us either by phone (608-877-9086) or email 3gaits@3gaits.org to discuss. Horses that live at Three Gaits are either leased to Three Gaits – meaning that the horse’s owner lends their horse to the program but maintains ownership of the horse – or horses are donated directly to the program. In some cases, we are able to purchase a horse. Three Gaits is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit and donation of a horse can be tax deductible.

Once we speak with you, if we determine that your horse seems appropriate for our program, we schedule a screening visit with an outside equine professional. With their recommendation to proceed, we schedule a visit for Three Gaits staff. With a second recommendation to proceed, the horse is trailered to Three Gaits begin a 30- or 90-day trial period. We may also schedule a veterinarian evaluation with our vet.

During the trial period, we expose the horse to the many toys, games and activities that they will encounter at Three Gaits. We work with them to see if they stand quietly for different styles of mounts and dismounts by ramps and mounting blocks, and to see how they tolerate the mistakes of a beginning rider or a loss of balance. We look at whether they seem to adapt to the lifestyle of working with many different people each day.

Thank you for considering your horse as a potential mount for Three Gaits riders. We appreciate your consideration and are honored that you are considering Three Gaits as a potential home for your horse.