

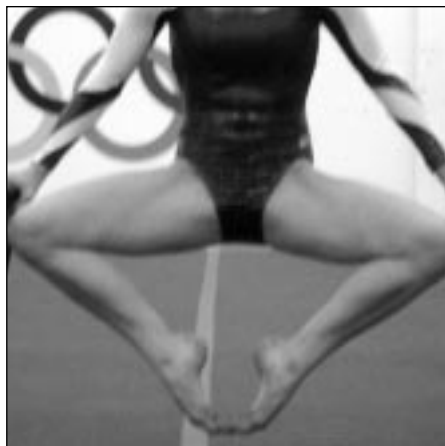
DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

THE PREFERRED TECHNIQUE AND SHAPE OF THE CAT LEAP

By Tammy Biggs and Geza Pozsar

The purpose of this article is to educate the gymnastics community on the cat leap which is utilized in many gymnasts' floor routines at all levels around the country. There should be a difference in the look of a turning cat leap and a turning tuck jump. The cat leap can be a beautiful skill, but should not resemble a tuck shape.

The shape that the gymnastics community would like to see is called a diamond shape. This is with the legs turned out (sideward) and high up underneath the hips. The toes may touch or slightly cross. The shape should come from a one leg take-off holding the diamond shape while in the air and the landing is on one leg. So, if the gymnast is turning a 1¹/₂ or double



cat leap, the diamond is the shape to see during the middle part of the cat leap. The knees should NOT be forward as in a tuck shape. The legs must show a shape that has both legs up under the hips. One leg up and the other leg hanging down throughout the whole cat leap is not the correct shape.

The USA Gymnastics Women's National Staff and top judges agree on this diamond shape position and we hope that the lower levels will start to train this turned out shape early so when the gymnast reaches a higher level it will be easy to get a high level skill that earns credit from the judges. Check out some of the judge's comments about the cat leap!

A LITTLE HISTORY

By Muriel Grossfeld

In the 50's floor exercise was called free calisthenics and tumbling was just beginning to be allowed as an important component of the event. Dance in floor exercise, as we know it today, was not allowed. For example, turned out positions like first, second, third, fourth and fifth and flexed feet were not allowed. Music was used for the first time for compulsory floor exercise in the 1956 Olympic Games and for optional floor exercise in 1958. Most connective moves were based on Scandinavian calisthenics until 1958. The cat leap was done during this period like a "cat." The arms swinging down moving/bending up and down in a more or less parallel position.

To my knowledge, I was the first gymnast to use what we call a turning

cat leap. A 1¹/₂ turning sauté de basque (dance called it a triple) was my opening move in 1964. My original background was dance but I came to gymnastics in my teen years. I didn't call my move a turning cat leap but someone later named it "cat leap."

Some explanation for why the "diamond shape" is important.

1. Reliable ability to do 1¹/₂ and double turns.
2. A more reliable and functional landing base. Landing on a turned in or parallel foot is less secure and more injury prone.
3. Provides the potential for triple turning cat leaps.
4. Scores better whenever a position is "still" in the air; the elevation appears to float or hang in the air (amplitude). Good form, especially leg-foot alignment is much easier to attain in the passé shape. The one leg up, other leg down syndrome is eliminated.
5. The diamond shape, along with a side, curved, or turning entry, makes it much easier to use the arms to accomplish the turn and to enhance the look of beauty and perfection. When the arms are not effective in facilitating the turn completion, then other body parts are used to accomplish the rest of the spin. Problems like losing posture and balance, turn in or insufficiently bent legs are just some of the potentially poor results of arm failures.
6. It is easier. Although I have heard it said second or third hand that the diamond shape is needlessly difficult, I believe the opposite is

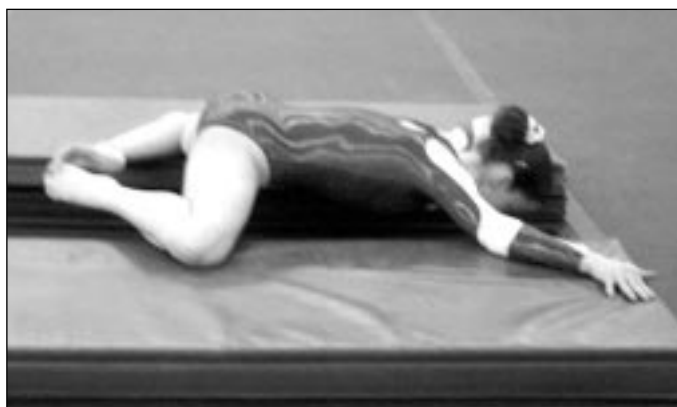


true. Yes, the shape must be worked, but once attained along with the proper take-off technique, the leap becomes very easy. It also requires less physical energy, which is important when the cat leap becomes part of the routine.

So the turning cat leap is like all things in gymnastics—if we select the most ideal technique and pursue it, our gymnasts are using their time wisely and they will score higher and be more consistent. They will also save time after the turning cat leap is learned because it takes fewer repetitions to maintain an ideal skill.

It's important to be as wise in the selections of dance techniques as flipping, twisting or swinging techniques. To achieve excellence, consistency and deduction-free dance performance requires work and proper planning. Just because a leap or turn can be "made" early on by just taking a short cut, this is not a good reason to pursue non-technique.

So, I hope that all of us who love women's gymnastics will agree that "Diamonds are a girl's best friend."



QUOTES FROM USA BREVET JUDGES:

JUDY SCHALK

After take-off on a turning cat leap, the second leg must quickly draw up tightly into position directly beneath the hips, joining the first leg to create a turned out "diamond" shape. The "diamond" shape should be held as long as possible through the duration of the turn in the air. Release from the "diamond" shape should be executed quickly and cleanly. The overall visual impression should be of the sustained "diamond" shape, not of the legs alternately moving in and moving out of position, never clearly defining a shape.

SUE AMMERMAN

I like to see the knees elevated and rotated outward and the toes pointed forward and up during the cat leap.

CHERYL HAMILTON

I prefer the cat leap to be performed with the legs in a balletic pas-de-chat position – bent knees opened to the side in turn-out, showing the diamond position.

LINDA CHENCINSKI

During the Cat Leap, it would be ideal to see: good turn out with the legs in a "diamond" position as described in the compulsory text; height in the jump; amplitude of the legs - hip height (knees above horizontal); good upper body posture with the shoulders pressed down and the neck long; exactness of the turn.

KITTIA CARPENTER

The classical cat leap position with knees out and feet under hips gives the dance in a floor routine a lightness and elegance.

MYRA ELFENBEIN

There should be a momentary point in the air where both legs are in a diamond shape in the air (under the body).

RENÉ NICCOLAI

A cat leap that is performed with the legs in a diamond-shape is AWESOME to behold and the training time to learn GREATLY appreciated.

DEBBY KORNEGAY

By performing the cat leap with the legs turned out in the diamond shape, the body stays more square.

MARIAN DYKES

The diamond shape for the legs give the cat leap a more beautiful look, accentuating amplitude and good body line.

CATHERINE (COOKIE) BATSCHE

The diamond shape gives the appearance of greater amplitude and flight in the cat leap and enhances the body line.

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EVELYN CHANDLER

The diamond shape under the body prevents the gymnast from making the error of pulling across the center body line with the trailing knee.

MARY LOU DILLARD

The diamond shape underneath the body is more aesthetically pleasing. It encourages taking off square and allows the gymnast to correctly complete more LA revolutions.

CINDY MCLANE

Performing the diamond shape in the cat leap accentuates better body lines and appears to have greater amplitude.

PAT PANICHAS

I look for good body posture with the legs bent and turned out. Both legs should show this position simultaneously at the height of the leap (diamond shape or slightly tighter).

TOM KOLL

Years ago when a turning cat leap was in the compulsory floor routine, the "diamond shape" was emphasized as the correct technique. Nowadays all you see are "turning tuck jumps taking off of and landing on one foot." There is no attempt to show any turn out. This type of leap should have a different value, as it is not a cat leap.

CAROLE BUNGE

Time spent on perfecting a good "diamond" shape cat leap leg position will lead to rewarding benefits. Setting the leap

with both knees turned out and outside, heels under simultaneously (not alternately), will make for a purer shape that will build into cat leap turns of higher value with no deductions.

LINDA THORBERG

Judges look for good body alignment and amplitude off the floor, where both legs are in the air at the same time passing through the diamond shape.

SHARON WEBER

The cat leap first must look different than the tuck jump with legs turned out. There is a time when both legs are elevated to show the position in air with feet under the body or slightly forward.

MARIA DECRISTOFORO

Too often the cat leap with turns is not awarded its values due to improper technique of the element. The cat leap is an alternating scissoring of the legs, with the legs turned out and not tucked in front of the body. The turned out leg position should be maintained through to the landing with the knees "breaking" the horizontal plane.

NOTE: Geza Pozsar and Tammy Biggs have produced a DVD to help coaches and gymnasts train the cat leap shape properly and to help in the overall development of a good cat leap. The DVD can be ordered by calling Geza at 916-208-8749.