

Harmonious Movement – Sidecar / Partner Outside

Please see the document **Harmonious Movement – Closed Position** (at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/wi-do.html> > Improving Dance Knowledge) which is the basic dance position of which Sidecar is a variation.

Understanding Sidecar (aka Partner Outside or Left Outside Partner)

Round dancing calls this position “Sidecar”(abbreviated SCAR) as a visualization that something is going on at the *left* side of their body, apparently referencing the apparatus attached to the left side of a motorcycle to accommodate another passenger in countries where vehicles drive on the left side of the road. In ballroom the position is called “Partner Outside,” “Left Outside Partner,” or “LOP.”

Instead of calling Sidecar a separate position, some have suggested it is a “shaping” of Closed Position. Indeed, in ballroom, Partner Outside is considered still Closed Position.

Initially when dancers use this position, they are simply instructed to take steps in such a way that both of their feet land *outside their partner’s left foot* (to the right from a dancer’s perspective) instead of the right foot moving *between* partner’s feet as in normal Closed Position. This is entirely reasonable, because beginning dancers generally have space between themselves and their partner and also initial dance instruction must focus on “the beat and the feet.” One must know where the feet are to be, and dancing at the appropriate time (or moving the body in synchronization with the music) is what dancing is all about!

Since initial attention is on the feet, little attention is paid to what is going on with the rest of the body, but actually how the *body* moves is extremely critical for comfortable and effective dancing.

Often beginning dancers think of their body rather like a plank so that the upper body and lower body always face the same direction. Thus, when they “step outside their partner’s feet” from Closed Position, their arms move in such a way that the right elbow is *in front of their body* and their left elbow is *behind their body* and the true side of their body (that vertical plane that separates the front of the body from the back of the body) is adjacent to the comparable spot on their partner’s body since both partners turn 1/8 of a rotation to step outside partner’s left foot.

While that is typical, and perhaps fine, especially when dancers have space between their bodies, it is helpful that dancers learn a very important contradictory concept as early as possible: in dancing *the body does NOT move as a solid plank*. Rather, the upper body and lower body VERY often *face different directions*! The concept describing this action is called “*contra body*” which simply means that the upper body and lower body are “against” each other, simultaneously facing two different directions, approximately 1/8 of a rotation apart. There is a twisting or *torsion*, at the waist. This is a “normal” body sensation, as when seated and turning to face the person in an adjacent chair.

Learning to dance is a “sculpting” or “refining” process. Attention to how the body moves is critical, especially to perform the more advanced figures. So, learning additional information about moving to Sidecar involves how the body moves:

First of all, dancers **must maintain their dance frame** which means that there is little to no change from one’s left elbow through the back and to the right elbow, including *and most importantly* that the *joints (angles) at the shoulders and elbows remain largely UNCHANGED* in relationship to their **own body**. And both elbows remain *in front* of the upper body so that as the upper body rotates left-face, the upper body *continues to face their partner*. Secondly, their feet *point as much as comfortable in a new direction* which is 1/8 of a rotation right-face from their previous direction of movement. If the **Lead** was facing Line of Dance in Closed Position

and moves forward in Sidecar, his new direction is toward the Diagonal between the Wall and the Line of Dance.

To accomplish these seemingly contradictory actions beginning in Closed Position, when dancers have space between their bodies, dancers rotate their **upper body** (think: shoulders) slightly *left-face* in order to prepare “airspace” for their partner *and* maintain that dance frame while *simultaneously* rotating their **lower body** (think: hips) slightly *right-face* so that their step can be made in that new direction. They end so that their “left side” is close to partner’s “left side” (these “sides” are places aligned vertically with a man’s suspenders or a lady’s bra strap). There is a distinct *twisting* at the waist. These rotations must occur *prior* to taking a step. In other words, Sidecar Position is achieved as dancer *move, in between two changes of weight*.

In the standard/smooth dances, the face remains as it was in Closed Position. When dancing Latin/rhythm dances, the face moves with the *upper* body in order to achieve eye contact with the partner.

It is also interesting to note that in Sidecar Position while the lower bodies are positioned to be able to walk comfortably, the *shoulders* are aligned with one’s direction of movement (*not the hips*), so that when moving forward with the left foot, the right elbow seem to “point the way” the bodies move.

Attaining Sidecar Position When Dancing with Body Contact

Notice that to attain Sidecar Position one’s left foot must pass not just *one* foot (as in Banjo) but *both of partner’s feet*. That makes it a much more difficult position to achieve when dancers begin in Closed Position or Banjo Position with body contact “right side” to “right side” (these “sides” are midway between the naval and true side of the body). In order to accomplish moving to Sidecar from one of these positions, sometimes one partner (generally the **Lead**) must step slightly to the side on a previous step (a “preparatory step” to create space) to allow the partner to step outside the left foot.

Also, Sidecar Position is generally assumed for only one step and is quickly resolved by the successive step moving to another position (either returning to the previous position or continuing movement in the same direction to assume Closed Position).

Additionally, because Sidecar is difficult to achieve while maintaining body connection with one’s partner (an indication of excellent dancing ability) competitive ballroom dancers generally choose not to use it in their routines.

When dancers begin in Closed Position with “right side” adjacent to “right side,” their transition to Sidecar means that both partners must move their connection point from their “right side” to their “left side.” Thus, when in Closed Position and moving to Sidecar Position, they slide from **Lead’s** “right side” to **Follow’s** “left side” *and* then **Lead’s** “right side” to **his** “left side.” These changes occur sequentially; there is too much change to achieve all at once.

As a general guideline, in a figure with three changes of weight, the new “side” contact is achieved *after taking weight on the second step* to allow for the foot to move outside on the third weight change. And because dancers attempt to keep their frame (upper bodies and arms) relatively stable, a third step in Sidecar creates a slight slant of bodies (so **Follow’s** head looks back to the left) and **Lead’s** left elbow slightly elevates.

Dancing the Wing

Often the **Wing** beginning in Semi-Closed (Promenade) Position is the first figure dancers are exposed to which ends in Sidecar when they have body contact. Even though the Lead has just one change of weight, he has a great deal of responsibility for *body* movement so that the figure can be performed well. While a close approximation of the figure is certainly acceptable, the following presents some of the finer points to refine the figure:

Beginning in Semi-Closed Position with the **Lead's** right foot free and the **Follow's** left foot free, dancers have body contact with Lead's "right side" and **Follow's** "left side." Both dancers step forward in this position with the **Follow's** left leg following behind the **Lead's** right leg.

Immediately upon assuming weight the **Lead** rotates his lower body *right-face* to prepare his body to be in position to switch to his *left-side contact* and simultaneously rotates his upper body *left-face* to encourage the **Follow** to step forward *at the next beat of music* with her right foot. When she steps forward, her "left side" slides to his "left side." Thus, on their "second step" they achieve Sidecar Position.

Then with appropriate body contact achieved, the **Lead** rotates his upper body more *left face* to encourage the **Follow** to step forward with her left foot, and he draws his left foot forward without weight (being careful not to do so too quickly or his knee might impede the **Follow's** path) often while rotating his lower body slightly right-face. The **Follow's** left foot is outside the **Lead's** left foot. The **Follow's** body is slanted slightly back, and technically she is in Closed Position, so her head looks back (to the left) and the **Lead** slightly elevates his left elbow.

While moving the body in two different directions at the same time in this figure, notice that the upper body continues moving *left-face* while the lower body continues moving *right-face*.

In the figure Closed Wing, again the Lead has only one change of weight. Beginning in Closed or Banjo Position, dancers have "right side" connected to "right side." Therefore, the **Lead** rotates his body right-face and steps forward with the right foot (**Follow** steps back with the left foot) so the **Follow** slides so they end with **Lead's** "right side" next to **Follow's** "left side."

At this point the **Lead** rotates his lower body right-face to prepare his body contact to change while he rotates his upper body left-face to encourage the **Follow** to step forward with her right foot. They end "left side" to "left side." They have achieved their new contact points.

The **Lead** continues rotating his lower body right-face and upper body left-face as he draws his left foot forward without weight while the **Follow** steps forward with her left foot.

Notice that after the first step (for example, the first count in Waltz), the action is essentially the same for both the **Lead** and **Follow** for the second and third counts in both Wing from Promenade and Closed Wing.