

COLLECTIVE REMARKS



Editor: Fran Kehr franwkf@gmail.com

HDS DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

Chronicle of the Horse features HDS Junior, Madelyn Yi, competing at the US Nationals in Lexington, KY November 7-10, 2024



Madelyn Yi and Cartwheel Toccata. Lindsay Berreth Photo

Lexington, Ky.—Nov. 9 Reprinted from *Chronicle of the Horse*. Article by [Lindsay Berreth](#).

His belly may just reach past the dressage letters, and it might take him forever to get down centerline, but 13.2-hand Welsh Pony Cartwheel Toccata has been holding his own at U.S. Dressage Finals this weekend.

With his 15-year-old rider Madelyn Yi, "Taco" scored a 63.24% in today's junior/young rider first level championship. "It went pretty good," said Yi, Houston, Texas. "I always love his leg yields. He's been working on his extended trots, and they're not perfect, but I'm so proud of him. He's making an effort."

The 20-year-old gelding (Pecan Creek's Polonaise—Pecan Creek Mazurka) was dwarfed by the larger warmbloods warming up at the Kentucky Horse Park, and Yi, who also rides a 15-hand horse at home, said it can be intimidating, but Taco puffs up when he arrives at a show.

"Sometimes I feel like we have to have double the steps!" she said with a laugh. "When I ride a bigger horse, everything feels easier, but with Taco, going down centerline feels like an eternity."

Taco came to Yi four years ago. He'd spent his career as a hunter pony in the short and long stirrup and children's hunter divisions. He was bred in Oklahoma by Janet Crouch of Heavenly Welsh Pony Farm.

"He was such a good, well-mannered horse. Kids could do anything on him. He was a polite horse," said Yi of her first meeting with Taco. "He didn't really know any dressage, but he was just naturally such a hard-working horse that it wasn't really hard to get him to it."

And now? "We just understand each other in a way," she said. "We know when to perform and when to do what we need to do. It's been really smooth. He draws so much attention. Everybody loves him, but sometimes he gets really mouthy about treats. He's such a character."

Yi has trained with Ashley Mendez of A&A Rosewood Sporthorses since she was 7. Mendez found Taco for her and was very proud of their performance today.

"They've been working on this since 2019, and they've come such a long way—from the time where she couldn't even reach below to saddle to where they are now is awesome" she said. "She's elegant. She's an excellent student, and she tries very hard. She puts everything she has into it.

"I think Taco is the most awesome pony," she added. "He's wonderful—he tries so hard, he is so sweet, he's literally my favorite in the barn, and I think pony power all the way! We'll go after all the warmbloods."

Breaking News:

New Award to Honor Character!

The *Character of a Champion* is an unmounted annual **\$500 cash** award aimed to recognize a Region 9 junior/young rider who has a winning character:

- hard working
- generous
- kind
- supportive of others

Being a good sport with good character is the prerequisite, no matter the history of ribbons and placings awarded or not of the candidate!

HDS thanks the Yi Family for sponsoring!!!

Watch for details to come on where to send nominations & when HDS will present for 2025.

REMEMBER TO JOIN US!!!

BAIRD 2024 HDS SCHOOLING SHOW CHAMPIONSHIP

&

OPEN SCHOOLING SHOW

(qualifying for 2025 SS Champs)

Dec 07, 2024

Great Southwest Equestrian Center

HDS has a very strong Schooling Show program. Schooling Shows are a wonderful way to begin your journey, (*not to mention much more cost effective!!*) into the exciting and fun world of dressage shows. Additionally, HDS has the best Schooling Show Championship! Super awards, victory gallops, and photo shoots just like the Recognized Show Championships. We take the HDS Schooling Show Championship very seriously, and make it quite an elaborate and fun experience!

To have qualified:

- Participants MUST be HDS members
- Qualification for end-of-year Schooling Show Championship classes require two qualifying scores within the level, obtained at HDS Recognized Schooling Shows between 12/1/2023–11/30/2024, per horse and rider combination. (two different judge requirement is waived this year) An open schooling show is held concurrently and is open to all riders. Qualifying rides in the open schooling show count towards the 2024-2025 show season. USDF tack & equipment rules strictly apply.

THANK YOU TO ROBERT W. BAIRD and Co Inc. for sponsoring this year's Schooling show Championships!!

THIS SHOW IS OPEN TO 2025 HOUSTON DRESSAGE SOCIETY MEMBERS ONLY.

MINUTES

7:00 PM Call to order and intro of guests

7:02 p.m. Approval of minutes

7:05 PM Board Reports

7:05 PM Treasurer's Report – Terry

- Angel will build reports for each show with Treasurer's help
- Entry fees were less than last year for Championships
- No Binancial stress right now
- Championship class fees will be going up for next year
- Detailed show reports built, because they are not correct/and need to be more informative with correct charges

7:10 PM Recognized Shows – Angel

- Time line and/or assignments for Schooling Show Championships
 - Sent out a task list on **11/11/24**
 - If **2** rings, main arena only
 - If **3** rings, Tellepsen as well
 - Custom ribbons being ordered tomorrow for SS Champs, **11/12**
 - Dawn ordered additional prizes
- Vests for YEA at January awards show – with the HDS logo

7:20 PM Special Events – Ashley

- Not on call

7:30 PM Advertising/Sponsorships – Jane

- New title sponsor for schooling show championships
- Baird Financial Consulting – new title sponsor for SS Champs
 - Sara Cuddy

7:35 PM Schooling Shows – Dawn

- Update on entries, qualiBied riders
- Last schooling show held yesterday, **11/10**
- **773** rides so far
- **6** members who have not registered horses
- **39** riders qualiBied that are not members
- **93** horses qualiBied for at least one level
- **22** rides signed up so far
- Almost **45%** of the riders in HDS membership are participating in SS programs
- Someone has to be responsible for taking laptop to GSWEC for freestyles

7:45 PM Juniors – Cate

- Nothing to report
- No Juniors riding with Ingrid
- Lilo Fore clinic at Twinwood – all JR's have opportunity, Th/Fri
- Region **9** Clinic – at Paragon – last week – need writeup/photos
- Madalyn Yi at Nationals – Taco and La Perla Negra – Chronicle of the Horse article

7:50 PM Awards – Trish –

- Trish, are you still interested in doing this? Do we need a new Awards chair???
 - Being dismissed as Chair
 - Maybe Simone takes over this position as well?

8:00 PM Education – Sarah

- Sarah got her silver medal with distinction this weekend! **11/9-11/10** Haras show
- Still not approved for HDS to advertise – at Twinwood
- Only open to Twinwood riders – Lilo Fore clinic PRIOR to the Jr Clinic

- Ally Brock clinic? HDS hosting?? Held at Twinwood – they wanted it limited to THEIR riders, Melanie and Leslie had organized prior about hosting a clinic only at Twinwood
- Traurig coming to Tex Over – maybe allowing auditors?
- Sarah Denham going to convention, and Cate trying to get there, Jody possibly going as well
- If you want to have auditors at your respective clinics, join HDS and we can add your clinic information in newsletter

8:10 PM Volunteer Coordinator – Jody

- Sign up on the website for SS champs, Flo will be posting the signup opportunities – needing wording to be sent

8:15 PM Publications and Media – Flo/Fran

- Send Flo ONLY the Binal version of whatever we want posted on the website
- Newsletter goes out to everyone that we have an email for, anything sent from Flo goes out to everyone, and membership link is at the bottom of every email

8:25 PM Membership – Diane

- Membership form to be sent to go in showbill
- Preferred way to join is online
- They can even join up to/on show day
- **276** – total members
- **170** – AA
- **52** – Open
- **37** – Jr
- **2025** – **30** members so far
- You can see who is a member of HDS if you click on membership tab and can look at the lists
- Wording needed for Flo for an email about renewing their HDS membership for **2025**

8:35 PM UnBinished Business

- L program responsibilities
 - Angel doing part 2 of L program
 - Dolly Hannon – instructor for Birst session, SCRIBES have to be gotten by those participating
 - First session – Sheraton – Clay Rd, 2nd session at January show, 3rd session at Marilyn's show in March (Emerald)
 - HDS is running/sponsoring the formal classroom stuff – they have to do items outside of what HDS is offering
 - **\$900** grant available for L program

8:45 PM New Business

- USDF – who is attending? Sarah, Cate, Jody
- Fran's email – what does HDS bring to the table? Why are prominent trainers not members? How do we attract members?
- Photography – Susan Stickle has exclusive rights at the Championship/CDI show, and they do portraits as well – there was a conflict with the resident photographer @ GSWEC – has an exclusive contract with the center – need to look at those agreements before moving forward
- EMT requirements with USDF – what is our exposure/not equipped or qualified with what is going on

9:00 PM Adjourn

Jessica made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Diane 2nd

US Nationals Nov 7-11, 2024more results for HDS and Region 9:



HDS Member, Patricia Hughes won the 2nd Level AA Freestyle on her horse San Angelo with a whopping score of 72.658%!!!



Reprinted from the Region 9 Newsletter:

US Dressage Finals

Congratulations to these rider/horse combinations which competed at the 2024 US Dressage Finals!

Nicole Acosa / Dante

Nicole Acosta / Cali

Christine Calao / Sternentaenzerin

Christine Calao / Faith CR

Christine Calao / Charlotte CR

Christine Calao / Freshman SHS

Donna Casey / Leganderry

Lindsay Cooper / Relentless NLS

Lindsay Cooper / Shulo

Barrett Barksdale / Brooklyn GCF

Jessica Blackmon-White / Donatella

Patricia Hughes / San Angelo

Valerie Jarosek / Flambeau

Brooklyn Loff / Capoeira Interagro

Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson / Vashti

Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson / Firefly HP

Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson / Final Fantasy HP

Payton Wilson / Duck Duck Goose

Ramona Winters / Basil the Great

Madelyn Yi / Cartwheel Toccata<

Madelyn Yi / La Perla Negra DC

Clinics Galore: George Williams, Lilo Fore, JJ Tate, Pam Goodrich, Anne Gibbons

Feel left out because you were unaware? All were at private barns, and we need to publicize these clinics so that members can audit where allowed. Is your barn hosting a clinic? Even if it's "private", please extend the info to *Collective Remarks* so we can publicize. **Free ¼ page ad in the HDS Newsletter for any clinics or other activities hosted by HDS members! Advertising can bring in more auditing fees plus giving our members an educational experience. KEEP US POSTED ABOUT YOUR FUTURE CLINICS!!!!**



Lainey Seabreez at the JJ Tate clinic in Palestine, TX.



Pam Goodrich Clinic at Windy Knoll Farm

Junior Riders:
Ruby Lewis riding Lil Miss
Sunshine Zoe Lewis riding PL
Café Au Lait

Reprinted from *Horse Sport* digital newsletter:

Equine Ownership

Debunking the Illusion of Lightness in Dressage

Achieving 'lightness' requires a shift of focus away from controlling the neck and head, and more attention directed to the seat and leg.



A lovely example of a properly 'uphill' horse that is showing lightness while also free of stress indicators: Merita Hagren of Finland riding Alkaline in the six-year-old horse final at the Longines FEI World Championship Young Dressage Horses in Ermelo 2024. (FEI/Leandro de Koster – DigiShots)

By: [Sheri Spencer, CEMT PTS](#) | November 20, 2024

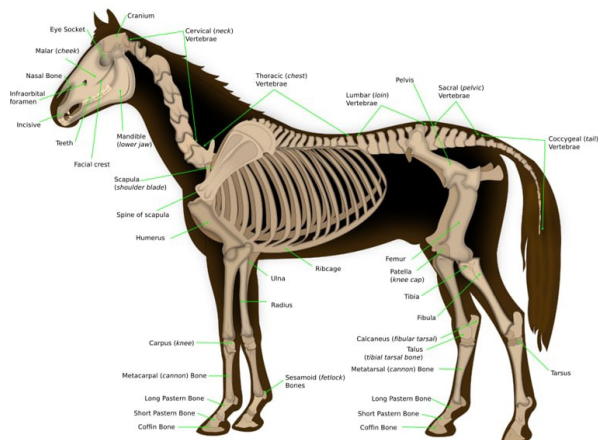
As common nomenclature in many equestrian disciplines, “lightness” is used to describe many things. In the midst of the competitive dressage debates, lightness of the horse and of the hand are of particular interest and warrant a deeper look.

Lightness is more than just a springy horse who appears light on his feet; it is a technical goal and a critical anatomical prerequisite to collection. Optimum performance of the horse requires lightness within their own physicality as well as in the communication from their rider for that sought-after harmony. To quantify a clear definition of lightness requires an analysis of the biomechanics of healthy, pain-free, happy horses. Through this, we can define applicable terms of what lightness truly is.

Anatomy of Lightness

The power of a horse’s movement is generated in the hindquarters, and that power is transferred through the spine over the horse’s back through the extensor muscles, which, when engaged, extend and stabilize the spine. This chain works in concert with the flexor muscles, including the abdominals, to bring the hindlimbs forward and flex the lumbosacral junction.

Working the chain also a French through upward carrying a When the enabling base of to lift, and and free



as an antagonist to the extensor chain to support organs and further stabilizing the back, the flexor makes bascule over the back possible. “Bascule” is term meaning “an arch that comes into being movement.” In horsemanship, this means a slight arching of the horse’s back and is needed when rider in order for the horse to move their best. muscle chains are properly engaged in movement bascule, the cervicothoracic junction – where the the neck connects to the thoracic spine – is freed the horse is empowered to proudly carry the neck the shoulder.

The equine skeletal system. (Wikipedian Prolific by Wilfredor/Wikimedia Commons)

Conformation Analysis, Deb Bennett, PhD explains “The actions that generate and facilitate lightness include tightening of the abdominal muscles, flexion of the lumbosacral joint, and bending of the joints of the hind limb, coiling his loins and hindquarters for thrust.” This coiling, she describes, arches the freespan of the horse’s back slightly upwards, and along with it the pommel of the saddle. “A horse must be able to bascule as well as flex around turns... Balance and bascule are intimately related.”

She further explains that “Because the horse’s back by nature is a flexible chain, a rider cannot lighten a horse’s forehand either by lifting the horse’s head or by sitting far back. Neither do high-lifted knees *per se* indicate lightness. ‘Lightness’ refers to the *whole* of a horse’s forehand. Lightness comes not from a horse’s head position or how he addresses the bit, but from engagement of the hindquarters, bascule of the freespan of the back and the ‘neck-telescoping’ gesture.”

The neck-telescoping gesture is the action of the cervicothoracic junction being lifted and the scalenus muscle, a relatively small muscle approximately the size of a human bicep, drawing the first rib towards the C3-C6 vertebrae in the base of the neck. “Lifting from the base of the neck” is a phrase commonly heard, but this can lead to various interpretations, including, for example, excess tension in the brachiocephalicus and vertical necks which are more often associated with hollowed spines.

But by changing the vernacular to identify the neck-telescoping gesture – that lifted, almost swan-like arched extension we often see in stallions – the idea can be better visualized. Because the scalenus is small, it is especially weak in young horses, and even in well-conditioned mature horses is not strong enough to overcome unhealthy movement patterns such as those of a horse with disengaged hindquarters, traveling hollow or inverted, or with a downward force over the spine. With conditioning and correct carriage in lightness, however, this muscle supports the cervicothoracic junction within the thoracic cradle, which all in turn contributes to freeing the shoulder for that expressive, gymnastic movement.

When the neck shape is coerced or compressed, it negatively impacts the horse’s balance and throughness.

Only through bascule and lightness is a horse capable of collection. This starts from and is always primarily a product of flexion of the lumbosacral joint and is completed when the scalenus muscles produce the neck-telescoping gesture. When movement patterns are incorrect, or the back is dropped, hollowed, or the neck is compressed, these muscles cannot engage. Bascule (flexion of LSJ and hindquarter engagement) plus flexion of scalenus muscles, need the body of the horse to be carrying from behind in order to free the cervicothoracic area so that they *can* engage.

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Leg-movers versus Back-movers

Despite recent trends lauding the expressive leg movements of upper level dressage horses, it is important to note that the high-stepping does not automatically equate lightness. As Bennett explained, lightness comes from the body, not solely the elevated activity of the limbs.

For a high-stepping horse to truly be light, the lumbar area behind the saddle should be lifted and not dropped. Often with the leg movers we see a dip between the back of the saddle and the croup which indicates a lack of adequate flexion in the lumbosacral junction and is generally also associated with disengaged hindquarters. Ideally, the lumbar area will be arched slightly upwards in bascule with a coiled loin and hindlimb capable of stepping well under the horse’s core.

Freedom of the spine to move as nature requires is essential for lightness, and this includes the neck. As the most mobile and flexible section of a horse’s spine, it’s premature to think that controlling the neck controls the horse in a constructive manner. Instead, such eAorts to manufacture or compress the shape act against the horse’s natural abilities.

The neck gets too much focus as it to note that when the body is moving position and carriage of the neck will in the aesthetically-desired manner. neck will be arched up and forwards telescoping gesture where the width thickest in the middle. The horse be reaching forward into the contact throatlatch. Unfortunately, it is to see such carriage and lightness in dressage.

When the neck shape is coerced or negatively impacts the horse’s throughness, disengages the thoracic sling, and makes it impossible to engage the scalenus for the neck-telescoping gesture. By trying to control the horse in front, it creates a cascade-eAect down the length of the spine, even acting against the ability of the hindquarters to properly engage.

In [*The Great Dressage Debate: Flashy versus Correct*](#), Tom Dvorak, one of Canada’s top international dressage riders, explains, “As riders we have had to adjust to the more athletic horse. Today’s horses are a lot more energetic and sensitive, so they require a rider with a good balanced seat, good feel, and – as with any horse – patience... Expressive movers, or flashy horses, are usually also quite high energy, which could easily create negative tension. Positive tension is what we need in the Grand Prix horse, but negative tension should be penalized.” Although the expressive “leg-movers” may dazzle in the ring, good training still requires throughness over the back for true lightness.



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compressed, it balance and

Every study from recent decades performed with ridden horses in multiple English disciplines has demonstrated that the weight of rein pressure is in significant excess of one pound, with dressage riders often having the heaviest hands of all.

Adverse Effects of Rein Pressure

If you delve into the classic works on the art of dressage, the old masters often tout that the weight in the reins should be little more than the weight of the reins themselves, with one pound being mentioned as the maximum weight in the hand. Soft hands allow the horse to reach forward into the contact with the neck-telescoping gesture as the final component prelude to collection. If the bit is pulling against the horse's forward reach, it risks disrupting their throughness, balance, and impairing the scalenus and thoracic sling.

Of all the research reviewed, every study from recent decades performed with ridden horses in multiple English disciplines has demonstrated that the [weight of rein pressure](#) is in significant excess of one pound, with dressage riders often having the heaviest hands of all. [A 2014 study](#) evaluating the effect of hyperflexion on the horse's stress response noted that, for some riders, their "competition frame" and hyperflexion were in excess of 11 lbs. (5kg) of rein pressure – exceeding the sensor detection limit for that study. With that much weight on the bit in the competition frame and hyperflexion, the horses' stress response and conflict behaviors were significantly higher.

To achieve true harmony in lightness with our horses, we must be brave enough to ride their natural movement rather than micromanaging their shape.

This study highlights the counterproductivity of "competition frames" and it's only one part of a much bigger issue. With the rising and rewarded [trend of riding in hyperflexion](#), curb reins pulled taut, and the prevalence of [blue tongues in Grand Prix](#), modern-day competitive dressage has strayed far from the classical principles of lightness.

Bits have been strongly associated with conflict behaviors previously [believed to be behavioral](#), and excessive rein pressure can [injure the sensitive tissues](#) inside the horse's mouth. Horses usually compress their necks in response to bit pressure. When the neck is compressed, regardless of whether it is held upright or "low-deep-and-round" (hyperflexion; LDR), not only is the horse's balance disrupted and natural movement inhibited, but [their ability to breathe](#) can become greatly compromised.

Multiple studies have observed that horses will often find some compromise to try and get comfortable within the restrictions, but there is almost always a rise in conflict behaviors as signs of distress – which are frequently disregarded by most riders as behavioral flaws.

Finding Harmony in Lightness

To achieve true harmony in lightness with our horses, we must be brave enough to ride their natural movement rather than micromanaging their shape. With the seat as the primary tool of communication, we can have a more positive influence that allows the horse to carry us from the hindquarters.

Surrendering the hand to follow the horse's movement shifts our focus away from controlling the neck and head and brings our attention to the seat and leg – the largest and most active surface we share for true communication.

Changes Ahead for the 2025 US Dressage Finals

Presented by Adequan®

Lexington, KY (November 21, 2024) – The United States Dressage Federation (USDF) and United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) are thrilled to announce that the 2025 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® are scheduled for October 30 – November 2, at the World Equestrian Center (WEC) in Wilmington, OH. Based on consistent feedback from competitors over the years regarding the unpredictable nature of the November weather, WEC was selected as the site of the 2025 and 2026 US Dressage Finals (October 29 – November 1, 2026), affording competitors and attendees alike an equivalency of experience in all aspects of this highly revered event. The selection of WEC was based, in large part, on the facility's over 200,000 square feet of climate-controlled riding space, in which all championship classes will be held, more than 750 permanent climate-controlled stalls, delicious onsite dining, and numerous luxurious lodging options.

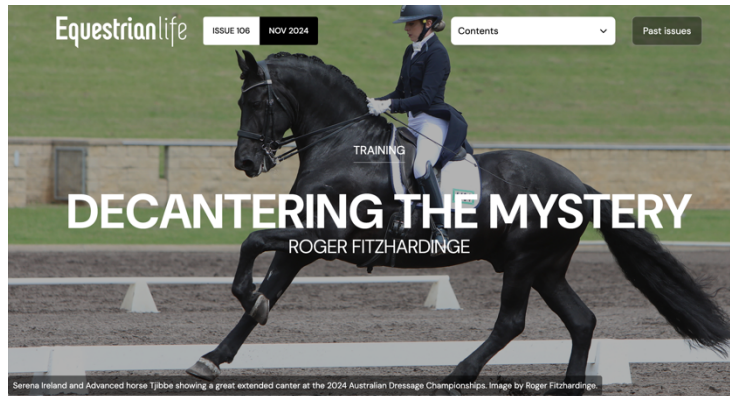
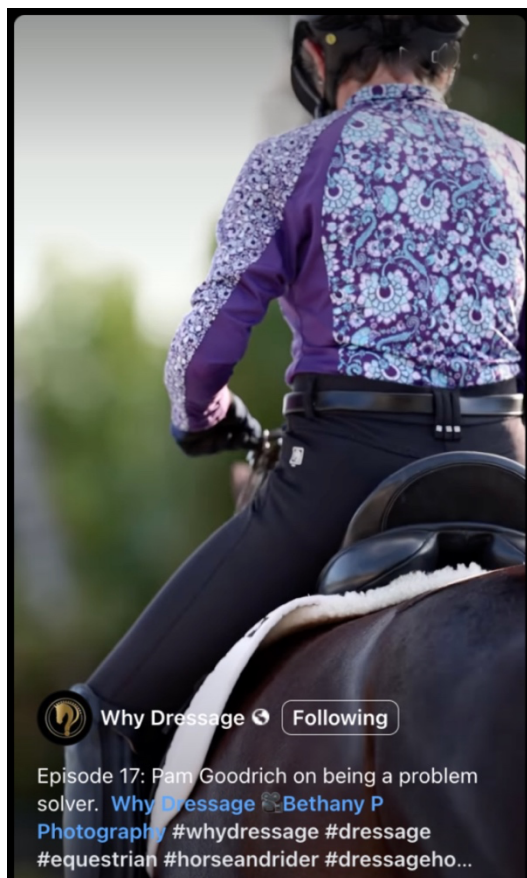
"Finally, someone listened!!!!"

Training Articles:



Why Dressage Features a reel With “Problem Solver” Pam Goodrich

click link below to make this live
<https://fb.watch/w5JIX55KuK/>



It is commonly said that you can't improve the canter, but that's not true – there are ways to refine and develop this elusive pace between the trot and the gallop.

Before you start to improve the canter it's important to know the sequence of the footfalls so that you know when to use an aid and when to be quiet, as the moment of the aid in the sequence of the footfalls is all-important. There is a clear three-beat rhythm (dar-dar-dum!) in the canter, and the footfalls for the left canter are right hind, then left hind and right fore together (a diagonal pair that are actually trotting, when you think about it!) and the leading foreleg, the left front; and then there is the period of suspension when all four feet are off the ground. This is the same sequence but reversed for the canter right, starting with the left hind, right hind and left fore together, then the right front leg and then the period of suspension. It is imperative that you know where your body and legs are at any phase in the canter as the timing for an aid in this pace is essential.



Horses are born with an inherent capacity to walk, trot and canter. Image by Roger Fitzhardinge.

Thirty-two per cent of the Grand Prix test is taken in the canter as opposed to 17 per cent allocated to trot, so it's important to have great canter! Horses are born with an inherent capacity to walk, trot and canter just as a human is born with an inherent way of

Moving. There are problems associated with the canter; the most prevalent being that the canter, when it is collected, can become four-beat, which is a serious problem. The canter can also become disunited, where the hindlegs cross-gait and the canter is not in the correct rhythm. The canter can become on the forehand or, as some put it, croup high. The canter can be short and choppy with a poor period of suspension.

CONTROL AND SUBMISSION

As with any pace, there is always the fact that before you can improve it you need to have control and an adjustable frame, and submission both laterally and longitudinally as well as in the forwards and the back. With this established you can then start to improve the canter. Probably the best way to see the problems is by taking a video of your horse in canter on both reins so you

can see what is lacking to score a 10. Also, good eyes on the ground and some lunging so you can see what is going on – or not going on!

Before which stick to Probably do not try or with a

to move a as will looking important feeling towards



As a rule in the canter, it's always best to have a more upward-thinking neck; pictured is Deon Stokes and MP Phoenix Rising, the 5YO Young Horse winner at the 2024 Australian Dressage Championships. Image by Roger Fitzhardinge.

There is supple

best to have a more upward-thinking neck. When done correctly, a great exercise is to ride the canter in a frame that is a little deeper and rounder than you would in competition. You must be careful to always think that you want to keep a supple poll and then feel that you ride the canter uphill from the back legs and then upward through the shoulders and the front legs up off the ground. Never get the feeling that the weight is rolling forward over the shoulders and the front legs can't get up off the ground cleanly and quickly. The feeling to the rider is that the horse is rocked over the hindlegs; as if the body has the position and feeling of the rein back, but the legs keep moving forward and out in front and forwards from the horse's center of gravity.

you can improve the canter, you have to ascertain parts of the gait are in need of improvement, and then the plan with dedicated and centered riding. the most important factor with the canter is that you to collect the canter too much with the younger horse horse that has a big, slow canter. Remember, most importantly, that in the canter the head and neck have little back and forth – as in the walk. By restricting this, happen in the walk, the canter may become lateral and lose the definitive three-beat tempo. It is more to ride the canter forward and not ever allow the that the horse is pushing his mouth downwards the ground.

no problem with riding the canter rounded and with a feeling at the poll, but as a rule in the canter it's always

SLIDING HORSE

The best example of pitting the hindlegs under in the canter is to think of the Western horse making the sliding-halt. The hindleg comes so far under it is almost between the horse's front legs. The hind-end almost sinks and sits to the floor with extremely flexed hocks and stifles and the forehand is raised and the front legs are up and barely touch the ground.

This is a great analogy if you want the horse to sit and engage as the sliding horse then...

1. He must be forward.
2. When you want to stop, the rider's position is vital... not leg-on!
3. Weight in the saddle and lean a little back.
4. Arms dead still and engage.

Of course, this is an extreme example, but it exactly demonstrates the theory of engagement. The primary important factor is, above all, that to stop or half-halt or get more weight over the hindleg, the horse must be forward, so you have some energy to convert to engagement. Take this sliding-halt theory and keep it in mind for any work with a thought of engagement. If in any ride when teaching a horse about balance and connection, and half-halts and reactions, then remember that if you don't get a good reaction to the half-halt then halt... if it's still a slow and sluggish reaction, then rein back, proceed and repeat. Every half-halt you ask must be answered. This is also of the utmost importance for the canter as if the half-halt is sluggish then the weight will not be transferred to the hind end but rather be loading the forehand!



Estuendo stepping his hind leg under in the extended canter for David McKinnon at the Australian Dressage Championships. Image by Roger Fitzhardinge.

GOOD FEELING

When you get a good feeling in the canter that the weight is taken back, then you must keep this transfer of weight as you ride forward. When you go forward, the contact is allowing the horse to move freely forward again but it is not yielding so much as to allow the horse's neck to get longer and downward as you go forward... this is why it is essential to have your horse sharp and quick off the leg to easily and readily accept the forward transition. This simple exercise of forwards and back will make the canter better, for sure, but never come into collection for too long as it is hard work and the chance that the canter may well become lazy and four-beat and lose the engagement and activity that you require. To use a metronome for the canter is a great idea. Set it at a canter stride (around 100 beats per minute) and when you collect, and ride forward keep the tempo the same. The tendency will be to become slower as you collect, and you need to feel that you are actually keeping the tempo quicker. (You can get a small metronome that clips easily on a belt.)

For any horse that tends to become slow with the hindlegs and almost become four-beat, or for those horses that lack a good separation of the hindlegs, then traverse is a fabulous exercise as this tends to make the outside hindleg leave the

ground a little earlier than it wants and so quickens the hindleg – but this exercise must be done with a rounded outline and a good forward connection to the bridle. This should always be combined with some straightening and forward and collection exercises following the traverse, and always – no matter what the pace – after lateral work it’s important to refresh the pace with brisk forward transitions.

CAVALETTI WORK

There is always room for cavaletti work to improve the jump and cadence in the canter. The absolute expert in these exercises is Ingrid Klimke, and through her father, Reiner, she has fabulous exercises over cavaletti to improve the canter. The period of suspension is improved as is the bascule and the technique that each stride makes when you make the canter over a sequence of poles.



Ingrid Klimke making use of cavaletti in the canter during a masterclass. Image by Stephen Mowbray.

Leg-yielding in the canter – that is, moving slowly and deliberately away from the inside leg and the bending – also increases the cadence in the canter and gets the horse to lift and stay off the leading foreleg and inside shoulder, thereby helping with balance and self-carriage. This exercise can be done by spiraling in on a circle and leg-yielding out, or, on the straight line (say the quarter line) and moving with good control to the outside track. The exercise can tend to slow the tempo in a good way by increasing the cadence and time the horse stays in the air.

Counter-canter is another exercise that helps improve the balance and needs to be done with a good feeling of self-carriage. The biggest thing here is not to allow the counter-canter to gain speed at each step and fall on to the forehand. Walk-canter and canter-walk, as this really helps and can be done during the counter-canter to improve the adjustability and control. Beware that the counter-canter is often ridden with so much caution not to upset as the lead change; well, this is not good, and you need to be able to ride forward and back in counter-canter, as you can flex and bend in or out within the counter-canter. It’s a great exercise but must be kept active and not earthbound.

The canter is a seriously important pace and there is no question that with good, logical and understandable clear gymnastic training, and with an eye to the future development of the whole horse both mentally and physically, there is a clear pathway to improvement. Primarily, step back from your horse and look at his canter as if you were a trainer and the horse was a client’s horse. Take emotion out of the equation and evaluate the horse’s strengths and weaknesses and set about making a plan to improve the balance and the canter. Never, ever take only the canter, but make sure you always keep the whole wellbeing of the horse in the forefront of your mind and never bite off more than you can chew and set tasks



Robbie Mckinnon and SPH Fortino, Small Tour Champions at the 2024 Australian Dressage Championships. Image by Roger Fitzharding

above yours or your horse’s capabilities.

Keep it simple, keep it clear, keep it continuously along the same way and allow time and the strength to develop. As with a gymnast, it doesn’t happen overnight but through progressive and diligent training at every opportunity. **EQ**

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Reprinted from Friday, Nov. 29, 2024 "The Chronicle of the Horse"

Ask 3: What Change Would You Like To See In Dressage?

PUBLISHED. November 26, 2024

WORDS BY. [Mollie Bailey](#)

In recent months dressage has faced increased scrutiny, both from within and from outside of the horse world, and [the Fédération Equestre Internationale recently held a special meeting](#) to kick off in-depth discussions about the challenges currently impacting the discipline. We asked three participants about the biggest change they'd like to see in the sport.

Sabine Schut-Kery

The development of the horse is an art that is achieved through proper education and perspective. Our educational system should teach us to preserve our passion and compassion for the horse, regardless of our competitive goals. My hope is that we can encourage people to keep education in the forefront of their minds in order to improve our relationship with our horses.

I always say, if you love money, don't work with horses. It's an ongoing responsibility, that I have to work hard every day to preserve my passion. That means not overbooking myself, not putting my own interest of being in the show ring before what I know is best for my horse, and not putting my horse in a place where he's overfaced. These are all horsemanship decisions I'm working very hard on. I think we all need to get together and keep working on that.

We always have to be looking in the mirror to be sure that we keep educating ourselves. I think there is a lot of riding that is produced by shortcuts that are driven by desire for fame or pressure to sell rather than informed decisions. I always must make sure the horse is in a test that's not over-facing him but is appropriate for him, and not just saying, "I want to ride Grand Prix."

I'm coming from Germany, where the educational system is very structured. Even if you want to become a house painter, you have to go with a certified teacher that trains you to do that for three years. For me to become a professional dressage trainer, I did a three-year apprenticeship with Jean Bemelmans in Germany, who was specifically educated to train a future trainer. That tells you how strict it is; I am not even qualified for that position. In addition to riding, I had to go once a week to school to learn the theoretical information, everything about horsemanship, feeding, how to manage a barn, medicine, everything. After one-and-a-half years, you have an interim test to see if you're on track with your learning. If you pass that, you go on to the second half of your apprenticeship and then have three weeks of testing. So that's your baseline.

I can count on one hand the number of coaches that I've had in my life. Yes, I've cliniced, of course, but I've only had a few regular coaches. You have to stick with it. It's important because dressage is so complex, [and] it takes a while until everything sinks in, and the horse understands technically what we're asking. Then the horse has to build the strength by us just doing it and seeing it through. I always say it's like planting a seed and nothing happens, nothing happens, nothing happens, and that's when you can't just give up and jump to your next trainer, because it's then, suddenly, the flower is starting to bloom.

I lived in Texas for seven years, and my coach came once a year for 10 to 14 days, but there was a point where I felt like I needed more. I moved to California for my education, not because I wanted to be on a sunny beach. I wish we would educate more and remember that the horse is a living being, and there comes a major responsibility with that. We have to be advocates for our horses.

We need education for the riders, trainers and judges, and also the fans and critics.

Sabine Schut-Kery, 56, grew up in Krefeld, Germany, moving to the United States in 1998. She rode Alice Womble's Sanceo to team gold at the 2015 Toronto Pan American Games, then to team silver at the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games. She lives in San Diego, where she continues to advance her own education under Christine Traurig.

George Williams

What I think is good about the current situation, where dressage is under a microscope, is that it's making us look at and reevaluate our sport. One of the things I'd like to really look at is our score system. I get the feeling that a 10 is considered excellent, and a 10 is considered almost too sacred to use.

After watching the Grand Prix Special at the Paris Olympic Games, someone said that out of all the rides, only one was considered "good" by our scoring system, because only one was over 80%, with 8 of course being "good" in our terminology.

Some of the others were right under the 80% mark, in the high 70s. You watch the riders first, and you think, "That was a good ride." Certainly, there were a few problems, a few mistakes or things that could be better, but thinking of it in the simplest terms, it didn't reach "good" according to our score system. I started thinking more and more about the implications of that. The question becomes: Do we expect too much from horses we're training?

If you look at young horse classes, it's possible for horses to score 10s; the winning ones are usually 9 or better in a lot of their scores. Then you look at the freestyles on the artistic side, and they can hit a 9, that is, 90%, or better on the artistic; on the technical side, generally they don't hit as high. Then you get into the Grand Prix, and somehow it's not possible to reach the same height in the scores.

Are we asking the impossible or too much of our horses? In doing that are we then putting a certain pressure on riders, trainers, coaches to keep getting better and better in the training and presentation, and is that realistic? Or do we have an unrealistic expectation of what a horse can do?

This isn't a criticism of the judges or judging, per se, just of the scale that's been developed over the years. I think in a lot of ways, the quality of judging and the quality of horse and rider performances have gotten better over the years, especially the quality of the top ones.

What we need to do is evaluate what really makes an 8, and what really makes a 9, relative to the natural ability of horses. In a judges' forum years and years ago, which was held at Tempel Farms when I was there, one of the riders came in and rode a pirouette. The lead judge asked the group, "What word would you use to describe that pirouette?" The majority said, "Good," but I don't think there was a single 8 when they held up their numbers. I think we should try to keep it a little simpler in that sense, that the number and the words reflect one another in each movement.

George Williams, 69, serves as the president of the U.S. Dressage Federation as well as the U.S. Equestrian Federation Dressage Youth Coach and the High Performance and Pathway Development Advisor. Williams, Wellington, Florida, represented the United States internationally during his riding career, finishing fifth at the 2003 FEI Dressage World Cup Final (Sweden), and he was a member of the bronze medal team at the 2005 CHIO Aachen (Germany) with Rocher.

JJ Tate

I think it's a such a great thing to just stop and assess where we are and ask: Is this where we want to be going? If this isn't where we want to be going, what could we change? How can we bring the people in dressage together and continue to make it the sport we all love?

I wish people would recognize the importance of a correct education versus just success in the show ring. I think true merit lies in good horsemanship and wonderful stewardship of the horse. When we keep the horse as our No. 1 focus—the horse is always first, and we serve the horse, and we do it because we love horses—I don't think you can ever go down a wrong road. So that solves the other things.

I've been very lucky to have had the same mentor for 35 years, Charles de Kunffy, who is just an incredible influence in my life. I'm just so blessed to have had someone in my life who absolutely always puts the horse first. He always emphasizes the importance of the human becoming a rider, which always comes from a place of, "A horse knows how to be a horse, how can we change ourselves to serve the horse better, to help him understand what we want and our aids?" We have to learn the vocabulary of the horse.

We need to come from this place of saying, "We are the custodians of the horse because they have no voice." It's through our correct equitation, which takes many, many years to learn, and through the understanding of a horse's anatomy, that we can help the horse live and perform for us for many years in a sound, happy way. There is a science of riding. The focus has gotten away from that harmony and how to truly train ourselves to train the horse better.

I was always taught that through a very gradual and thoughtful system we develop the horse into his best self, and as a byproduct then we grow into our best selves as well. I worry now everything is about winning and scores, and people think if you win you must be great, and you must love horses.

When you become educated, it brings you more confidence to speak up for your horse. There are a lot of people that don't show or haven't been super successful for whatever reason, but they're well read and well educated and care about teaching. That person can be really important to a lot of people. To me it seems like the education piece has gone down in priority, and scores and winning have become the only ways you judge the quality of a trainer, and I don't think that's actually true. There are a lot of people who can help you with your riding, but *you* have to be educated to know the difference. It gives responsibility back to the rider to decide the right path for their horse. I'm sure there are people out here who want to win at all costs, who want to go to the trainer who will win at all costs. Most people want to ride better and develop a better relationship with their horse and to feel like they're getting better while their horse's well-being is respected. That doesn't always come in the package of someone who is showing and winning all the time. When you know the difference then you can make better choices.

Jessica Jo "JJ" Tate, 46, lives in Landrum, South Carolina. She is an international Grand Prix dressage rider and trainer who has taken more than 30 horses to the Fédération Equestre Internationale levels. She also runs Team Tate Academy, an online training module, at teamtateacademy.com.

A version of this article originally appeared in the September 2024 issue of The Chronicle of the Horse. You [can subscribe and get online access to a digital version](#) and then enjoy a year of The Chronicle of the Horse. If you're just following COTH online, you're missing so much great unique content. Each print issue of the Chronicle is full of in-depth competition news, fascinating features, probing looks at issues within the sports of hunter/jumper, eventing and dressage, and stunning photography.

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- [Dressage, From The Magazine](#)

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Andy moved to WV in October 2024 after Isabella Farms closed operations. WV and Andy thanks Isabella Farms, Dawn Chamorro, and Tina Kittel for all they have done for the sport of dressage. Isabella Farms has been an icon of the Houston dressage community: Dawn and Tina's contribution to the sport of dressage will have an enduring impact for years to come.



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Jody and Tony DeStefanis purchased the watermelon farm in 2016 with the dream of creating a training facility for adult amateurs, centered around the care and comfort of the horse. Their dream became reality when WV opened for business January 2017.

Jody started riding in 1978 and competed successfully in endurance and eventing before switching to dressage in 1989. Jody has earned her Bronze and Silver Medals on self-trained horses with the support of exceptional trainers along the way! Now Andy adds to that mix, and WV is grateful to welcome him onboard!!!

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