

Rollkur

The Classical Riding Club is opposed to Rollkur, we do not condone it in any form which is reflected in our Dressage Judging System.

Rollkur - contrary to what many riders think - is not a suppling process other than to "rubberise" the horse's neck. This practice is considered very harmful by all the great Master Trainers of the last 2 centuries. It causes blockages to occur between the horse's back and his shoulders, so that the energy from the hindlegs will not be carried "through". This would explain the lack of engagement that we see in many competition horses today, where the front legs have a very stilted, exaggerated action and the hindlegs do not match them.

What is Rollkur?

Rollkur is just a name for what most trainers, like myself, used to call severe overbending. Briefly, the outward visible signs are:

- Horse's head behind the vertical
- Neck shortened
- Poll no longer the highest point
- Crest high
- Horse unable to see where he is going

Some of the ill-effects of such unnatural posture are:

- Damage to ligaments between the wither and the base of the neck
- Hollowing (under saddle) of horse's back
- Tightening and tension in scalenius muscles of neck
- Restriction of air flow through nostrils
- Other various rebound effects, e.g. clamping of horse's jaw, mental stress, swishing tail, blocking through spinal processes...

... All of which combine to give an appearance of a tight, 'stuffy' horse which does not flow throughout his body.

The alternative to Rollkur to supple the horse CORRECTLY is to work the horse on a long-rein with soft, yielding hands first in walk, later as the horse gets stronger, in trot and in canter. The importance of the rider's leg acting at the girth to support the horse's back is vital, throughout this process.

Until we can promote a better philosophy of riding - based on biomechanical truths - incorrect procedures like the Rollkur and all the other travesties - will continue to degrade Dressage as a Discipline.

The "Blue Tongue World Cup" video on You Tube this week is therefore very much a symptom of all that is wrong about Dressage Training today. People are bypassing the old, proven methods where the rider trains at the horse's own pace (as promoted by The Spanish Riding School of Vienna) and are now using abusive shortcut methods in order to win over the judges.

What does this say about judging today?

What does it say about crowd pleasing?

What does it say about the education of riders?

CRC has often been accused of living in the past or being fuddy-duddy. Sylvia Loch has been accused of being an "old curmudgeon"! Isn't that better than being actively cruel and ruining the lives of hundreds of horses?

People need to be educated as to what is pure and correct (i.e. classical) if dressage is to remain a reputable discipline. We don't pretend to know all the answers but we have made a start and implore you to offer your support.

Please add your signature to the petition to request the FEI ban Hyperflexion in the Competition.

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/antiHF/>As a result of the "Blue Tongue" Epona clip we have sent the following letter to the FEI

Sir/Madam,

The Classical Riding Club is aware of the enormous outpouring of public outrage prompted by the Epona (You Tube) film clip of a top competition dressage horse being worked in Rollkur before a competition event. Scenes like these and the suffering of dressage horses could so easily be avoided for the future with the right checks and controls in place.

I would refer the FEI to my courteous Letter to the Princess Haya, President of the FEI sent in August 2009.

Enclosed with this letter was a copy of 'Making a Difference' - Dressage Rules and Guidelines' (published by The Classical Riding Club in 1998) in which ideas are offered which could revolutionise the present system of judge training and marking. Ideas borrowed and implemented from this publication would go a long way to assist in upholding the FEI Object and General Principles of Dressage, which have been too easily ignored or overlooked in the past few years.

It was further suggested that dialogue with the Classical Riding Club and other interested international parties might lead to a state... where as quoted from my letter '...we would swiftly remove those practices which have led to stressful training, robotlike performance and of course the need for methods like the rollkur, etc' which are bringing the sport into disrepute.

In view of the present crisis of training, the Epona clip being just one example of some of the training travesties that exist at this time, we now ask for a response to our friendly and peaceful endeavours to assist in these matters.

The future integrity of the discipline depends upon openness and dialogue with all concerned. Please may we expect a reply?

Yours faithfully

Sylvia Loch
Director of The Classical Riding Club

Dear Ms Loch,

Thank you very much for your email.

The FEI is aware of the video filmed by Epona.tv at the FEI World Cup TM Dressage qualifier at Odense (DEN) and posted on YouTube. FEI's main concern has always been and will always be the welfare of the horse. We are taking the issues raised in the video and in the comments made by members of the public on social media very seriously and have opened a full investigation. The conclusions of this investigation will be made public in due course.

Kind regards,
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BHS Chairman writes to Princess Haya

BHS Chairman Patrick Print FBHS has written to FEI President, HRH Princess Haya, to demand an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the apparent distress of Patrick Kittel's horse at Odense earlier this month, and into the ethics of rollkur more generally.

Copy of Patrick Print's Letter.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

About 20 or so years ago a fashion crept in for putting horses in drawreins with the idea that they would come onto the bit more easily and so produce a 'better outline'. We saw this happening not only in dressage circles but also in jumping

and eventing yards and even some riding schools.

Those of us who were able to work horses correctly and gradually, thereby achieving a softer, 'rounder' way of going, railed against these methods arguing that unless the rider was very skilled, more harm could be done than good. We also pointed out that a skilled rider should not need such artificial aids and that introducing them too early - especially with the young horse - could lead to muscle wastage between the wither and the base of the neck with real trauma and lasting damage done to the ligaments particularly that of the trapezius.

Between 1992 and 1994 I ran a Petition to gather signatures against the use of Drawreins for competition horses. This was before the age of the Internet and sadly, we never really got the momentum or the number of supporters we had hoped to achieve, although I kept writing articles and books to demonstrate my concerns. Now, although drawreins are still used all over the world and in all spheres of riding, things have worsened. Today we are seeing dressage judges rewarding horses that are clearly overbent and thus ignoring their own rules, i.e. the FEI Dressage Rules and Principles. Riders will school for hours and hours, not necessarily in drawreins but with such an unyielding contact that the horse is equally constricted and 'tied in' (as he would in tight drawreins) to the extent that he becomes no more than a slave in bondage.

Whilst there are many veterinarians and other experts out there who warn against the effect of Overbending and Rollkur - there is as yet no real will for change. We lack at top level, the recognition of the harm that these methods do from those who govern equestrian sport. As long as the horse performs, most authorities seem unwilling to acknowledge the horse could be working in real pain. Yet surely, common sense and observation of how the horse moves naturally, should tell us to abandon these practices? If in any doubt as to the chain effect of forced posture - try this.

Try jogging, dancing or jumping (as in dressage and showjumping) with your chin pulled in towards your chest. You may still be able to jog, dance and jump, but the pain over your neck and back will be excruciating. The longer you do it, the worse it will get. If you are still in doubt, now try carrying a weight on your back at the same time. The difference is you can scream. The horse cannot!

BHS Release Further Statement.

"As the debate over the use of hyperflexion as a training technique continues, The British Horse Society's policy may be stated as follows:

The British Horse Society strongly recommends that all riders training horses on the flat and over fences should adhere to the official instruction handbook of the German National Equestrian Federation. Whilst we appreciate that horses are as individual as humans, and that some may require corrective schooling, the BHS's stand on hyperflexion (by which we mean the extreme flexion of the horse's head and neck beyond normal limits) remains clear: it is an unacceptable method of training horses by any rider for any length of time.

We recognise that the scientific evidence is conflicting, and likely to remain so as each party seeks determinedly to prove its case. For this reason we doubt that science will ever provide a single, clear, unambiguous and unarguable answer. It therefore falls to humans to do what the horses cannot, namely to follow the precautionary principle: as nature provides no evidence of horses choosing to move in hyperflexion for an extended period of time; and as hyperflexion can create tension in the horse's neck and back which has no justifying necessity; and as the horse in hyperflexion is, by definition, unable fully to use its neck; and as the psychological consequences of such treatment remain latent (perhaps in an analogous position with horses which are whipped aggressively but which can still pass a five star vetting), we should take all appropriate steps to discourage the use of this training technique, for the horse's sake."

Letter to Horse and Hound

The following letter from Sylvia was published in Horse and Hound, Thursday 18th February 2010.

Sir/Madam

It was heartening to read the FEI Statement concerning the discreditation of Rollkur as a so-called 'training technique' this week. Gerd Heuschmann, the German vet has consistently put across the harsh reality for horses of this punishing way of schooling, as have organisations like The Classical Riding Club who were the first in this country to petition against extreme over-bending back in the early 1990s. The point is a good horseman or woman has no need for these artificial methods. Breaking down the horse's neck muscles in the more extreme cases, may give the rider more control but when the horse cannot see further than his front feet, it most certainly becomes a welfare issue. No wonder Gerd was able to draw on over 41,000 signatures to say 'enough is enough!'

The stance of the British Horse Society on the subject was admirable. As reported under your News column, the psychological consequences of rollkur are undeniable and it is very much hoped that British Dressage will now encourage our judges to mark in favour of horses who are not 'tied in' in any form of test. At prelim and novice levels, it

would be good to see young horses allowed to adopt a more natural position of the head and neck without being marked down, and at more advanced levels, the FEI rule of poll the highest point and lightness of the forehead, must be more strictly adhered to. Flashy, incorrect paces may wow the crowds, but surely the horse's wellbeing and state of mind comes first?

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