

Concerning Balance – Putting the Young Horse on the Aids – and Why Every Horse is Different

Extracts from the late Master Horseman Wilhelm Museler (died 1952)

Many years ago, whilst still working and living in Portugal, my late husband Henry Loch encouraged me to study the great classics. He gave me a copy of Riding Logic by Museler to start; within five minutes of delving into this book, I was hooked. Museler was a member of the German Olympic team in the early 1900s and his fascination with the art of schooling was equally shared with his love of history of art which struck a chord for me – my father was an artist. Too often the German system is thought to be too rigid but for me these excerpts from Riding Logic show a very open and thoughtful approach. SL

What is meant by putting the the horse to the aids?

A horse is properly put to the aids, or stands at the aids if the following have been attained:

- 1) The horse is fully relaxed. There must be no tenseness or rigidity of any kind, either in the jaws, in the poll, the neck, the back or the legs, nor in any joint or muscle – nowhere.
- 2) The horse is properly between the legs, at the rider's back, at the reins, and in equilibrium. That means that the whole of the moving mechanism of the horse must be willingly put at the disposal of the rider. This naturally comprises also that the horse understands the influences of leg, hands, weight and back and that it is prepared and ready willingly to obey those indications.

Being put to the aids does NOT mean-

- 1) A certain position or carriage of the horse, or
- 2) That the horse can already understand and obey the aids which are composed of the various influences

At this stage the relaxed horse should willingly and with full confidence carry out the simplest things which the rider asks of him. This, at the trot and at the canter, should give the rider a feeling of harmony and coordination; at the walk and at a standstill the feeling will come much later. Thus the basis is created on which to continue the education. Without the horse's goodwill and his confidence in the rider, and without his being fully relaxed, cooperation and harmony between them is hardly conceivable. Even if only one of the above described conditions is not truly fulfilled, there will always be difficulties of some sort, which may in turn lead to a catastrophe, or will at least bring about circumstances under which the rider will not be able to carry out his intentions. All this depends on the character of the horse and the horsemanship of the rider.....

What does a horse look like when put to the aids?

The question is posed here merely because riding pupils often think of the matter in that way. It cannot be answered by describing a particular bearing or carriage of the horse recognised as being the best or most desirable. *This would lead the majority of riders to lure or force their horses into that posture, a procedure which contains a great danger for every rider! It leads to deceive not only others but himself so that later on he cannot distinguish between right and wrong. **Carriage or bearing will always vary and must correspond to the degree of dressage and to the character and conformation of the horse. The correct answer to the question posed above, therefore can only be: 'As if there is perfect harmony between rider and horse.'

The statement that harmony between man and mount should be visible, indicates that a single brief glance does not suffice really to recognise it. It is necessary to observe both the horse and the rider for some time before it is possible to say whether the horse has been put to the aids or not. And it is necessary to observe them at the halt as well as in motion, at changing the lead at the canter, going through corners, in parades, on circles and so forth.....

Every movement must be quiet and harmonious and must look it. Not only must the whole carriage be harmonious, but every single movement of the horse as well as the rider must be harmonious in itself and in collaboration with the rest. The horse must give us the impression that he feels comfortable and the rider must look as if he were doing nothing at all but that everywhere, so to speak, is going by itself. This latter request, i.e. that the aids should be invisible, is of the utmost importance.....

Collection and erection

Dressage proper does not begin until the [younger] horse, by having been put to the aids is prepared to obey these aids... A clear conception of the final end of dressage is necessary; otherwise one cannot distinguish between right and wrong procedures.

The purpose of dressage is education to absolute obedience, increased efficiency and handiness. The road is a long one, but through various lessons it leads to the most perfect harmony between rider and horse in Haute Ecole. The improvement of suppleness and swing must always be the criteria as to the correctness of the procedure. The more handiness the rider demands of his horse, and the more frequent and the shorter the various turns to be executed in full harmony, the more importance must be attached to the complete control of the horse's hindquarters, which are his principal source of power.

The horse's centre of gravity is nearer to the forehead than to the hindquarters, owing to the fact that the weight of the neck and head rests on the forelegs. The front legs therefore support the greater part of the weight, but the hindlegs provide the motive power. Racehorses and steeplechasers carry the bulk of the load on their front legs, as do carriage horses, especially the heavy draught horse. This can be nicely observed with horses pulling a heavy van or plough.

The school horse, however, especially if he is to do high school work, must use his hindlegs, not so much for propulsion as for carrying purposes, and they must therefore be made to step well forward and under the centre of gravity. This is called collection, or collecting on the hindquarters...

Collection is obtained partly by special exercises serving this particular purpose, such as bending the hocks, side-stepping and shoulder-in, and partly by the whole of the training through which the horse is put, as well as by every single half-halt.

Through this kind of work, the horse will almost automatically, we might say, contract more and more from rear to front. The hindquarters become lower, the hindlegs are busier and more energetic, stepping well forward under the centre of gravity.

Not only is the horse more attentive and more prepared to make his best efforts upon the slightest indication of the rider, but he also looks more pleasant and makes a proud impression. For this reason, artists of all times have chosen to portray horses in this position when they wished to create an effect of majesty. One thinks of such immortal monuments as the Parthenon frieze and the Pergamon altar of ancient Greece, or the wonderful monument of Prince Eugene in front of the Imperial Palace at Vienna. Velasquez, the great Spanish painter and David, Napoleon's French portraitist, invariably represented horses in the Levade.

NB The underlinings and asterisks shown in these Excerpts are my own.

**How wise are those words. I fall of today's riders took them at face value there would be no need for artificial gadgets or rollkur to force horses into certain attitudes before they are ready for them*

*** This statement is also most important. One of the reasons we set up the CRC Dressage Judging system was to allow for breed differences and not to penalise a horse that was moving correctly for its breed type or frame simply because it did not have the same movement of some other breeds or 'dressage types'.*

The underlying message of this paragraph is Harmony in Horsemanship – the CRC Message.SL