

BERNIE TRAURIG THE MAN WITH A MISSION

By Khaled Assem

TAKING TIME OUT OF HIS BUSY SCHEDULE, THE WORLD-RENOWNED RIDER, COACH, AND HALL OF FAMER BERNIE TRAURIG SPOKE WITH HT ABOUT HIS TECHNIQUES, HIS MOTIVATION, AND HIS INSIGHTS. THE MAN AT THE VERY TOP OF HORSE SPORT OVER THE DECADES, EXCELLING IN HUNTERS, JUMPERS AND DRESSAGE, HAS TURNED HIS INCREDIBLE TALENTS TO TRAINING AND COACHING, PASSING THE GIFT OF HIS LONG EXPERIENCE, SKILL AND PASSION TO THE NEXT GENERATIONS.

Bernie, the “American School of Equitation” has long been and remains a very special and unique one. Who were the most important founders of this School and what makes it so different?

We actually refer to it today as the American Hunter/Jumper Forward Riding System, rather than the American School of Equitation. The system is composed of three parts and is not only about a particular seat, but incorporates Position, Controls (aids) and Schooling.

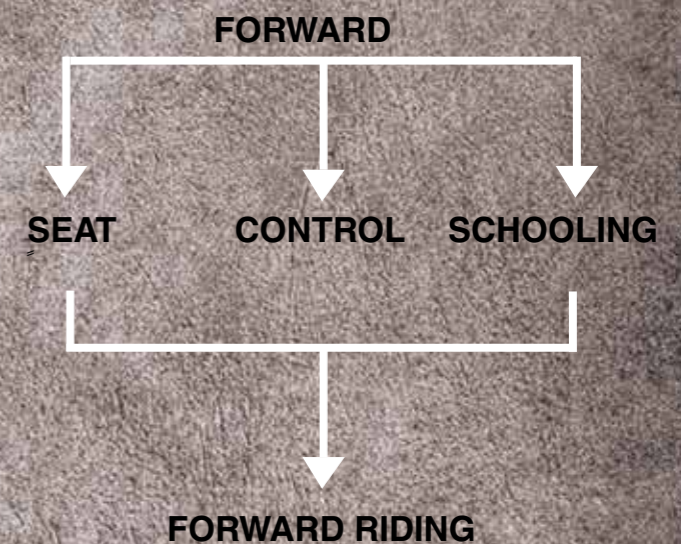
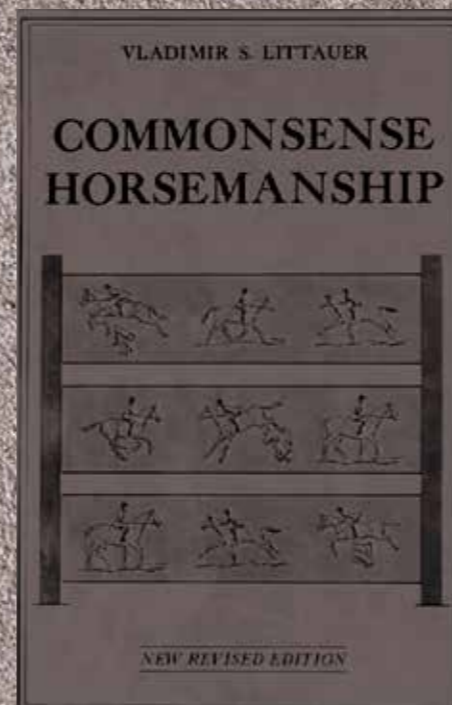
Captain Vladimir S. Littauer, one the founding fathers of the system illustrates this in his book “Common Sense Horsemanship” as depicted in this video from the early 50’s, see <http://tinyurl.com/mf4vt7g>. The system is very old and its roots are heavily Cavalry based. Its origin dates back to the beginning of the 20th Century with Frederico Caprilli, an Italian Cavalry Officer. His forward riding methods were revolutionary at the time and the Italian Cavalry School adopted Caprilli’s methods into their teachings entirely in 1907.

The Italians were very generous about sharing their methods and invited Cavalry officers from around the world to train

with them at Pinerolo and Tor di Quinto, Italy. Soon officers from around the world were gleaning Italian methods and incorporating them into their own systems. American Cavalry officer Harry D. Chamberlin spent a considerable amount of time training in Italy as well as the French school in Samur and brought back techniques from each. He incorporated his new techniques into the US Cavalry Manual which leaned heavily toward the Italian’s system. Captain Vladimir S. Littauer, a Russian Cavalry Officer and my coach for six years as a junior, both fine-tuned the works of Chamberlin and promoted them across America to the civilian show riders and fox hunters. Gordon Wright, who spent a short stint in the US Cavalry, was also instrumental in refining the techniques of the Italians and the French and produced many championship and Olympic riders. Bertalan de Nemethy, a Hungarian Cavalry Officer, immigrated to America and got the job as Coach of the United States Equestrian Team, a position he held for 25 years. Bert’s background also included some training at the German school in Hannover. Bert now blended in the best of the German system, which was more dressage based than the Italian system, and his

results with our US Team were amazing. Bill Steinkraus, Captain of the US Team for many years, was one of the most intelligent horseman ever and a rode with a beautiful forward style, as did our whole US Team from that era. (This video link also includes clips of our US riders from that era <http://tinyurl.com/mf4vt7g>)

These riders gave America a visual image to follow of a beautiful forward seat. These were the genius masters of the last century and the system still continues to get modernised and refined today with some of our great teachers such as George Morris and hopefully myself. It’s primarily a blend of Italian, some French, and some German which is more dressage based. The Forward system is different as it is based more on the riders balance in his stirrups rather than his seat and more simplistic schooling techniques that suit horses that are galloping and jumping in forward balance rather than the dressage based system which is based on the riders seat and fundamentally suited for horses in central, not forward balance and who compete in small, flat arenas in collected gaits. That said,



Position, Controls (aids) and Schooling as illustrated by Captain Vladimir S. Littauer in his book 'Common Sense Horsemanship'



of course, the forward system incorporates in more advanced stages some of the collected or, as I say, semi-collected exercises we feel necessary to expand the horse's education. I think the goal of every rider with high ambitions should be to have knowledge of both systems, both in theory and execution. A top rider should be able to adapt to the horse and be flexible with his/her techniques. A hot blood horse may hate the German system and a colder type warmblood may demand the German system. I was fortunate to learn from some of the best teachers the system of dressage and that I consider a gift!

You are one of the most renowned coaches worldwide. What do you focus on when you are coaching; young or senior riders?

To me basics are basics, whether you are teaching a young person or senior rider. I focus on the basics of the system - position, controls, and schooling. They are all interconnected. First, position is so important. I believe that "Function follows Form, in riding". Proper position is essential to control the horse. All the aids work better when the rider is in the proper position. Schooling the horse in this system is so easy when you keep it simple. "Riding Simplified" is my motto. It's easy to complicate the sport for not only riders, but especially the horse. One must speak to a horse in a simple and clear language! I started thinking about how to spread education worldwide in a big way when technology started to facilitate spreading knowledge to the masses. Implementing it took a few years and EquestrianCoach.com evolved from the efforts of many.

EquestrianCoach.com presents a very special and new idea; how did you come up with such a concept and

do you think that E-Coaching could ever replace the ordinary techniques of direct in-person coaching?

For some folks in remote areas or folks that work a lot on their own, it's an enormous tool that, yes, on its own gives you the tools to be successful. For others it's an invaluable supplement to their training along with their coaches. For coaches, it offers insight to many world class and Olympic trainers' schooling and teaching techniques. For me, it's an invaluable homework source to riders that participate in my clinics. I can help someone with an issue and then direct them to a topic where they get a visual representation and reminder of their homework to resolve their issue.

You visited Egypt in December 2012 for an intensive training clinic; what are your thoughts on the riders you coached and was the experience up to your expectations?

The riders I worked with during my time in Egypt last spring exceeded my expectations! Attitude, desire, and talent all together. I was extremely impressed with the style of the riders as well. There were many riders that looked like they trained in America for years. My thought from my trip that stands out is that you have a great deal of talented riders who, with the right programme, can accomplish any of their own goals, dreams and your country's expectations.

You were a very successful rider; what were your biggest wins (please provide links) and who were your most influential coaches?

I have been blessed to have had exposure to from many great, great horseman and teachers - Littauer, de Nemethy, Frank Chapot, Mike Smithwick, Johan

Hinneman, Christolot Boylen, Richard Wadjen, and many others. So see some of my biggest wins, visit <http://tinyurl.com/krw2go3>.

Who are the riders that you find exceptional or uniquely talented, and why? Please give us your insight.

I think I'm too long in the tooth to give you a few riders that I feel are extremely special, as through the decades there are so many exceptional ones and your readers probably would not know them. Bill Steinkraus stands out in my mind as an exceptionally athletic and intuitive jumping rider. Not only did he win the Individual Gold medal in Mexico over the biggest jumps ever in the history of Olympic Sport, he piloted so many horses to international wins over the span of his career and in a beautiful style! Watch a short video here <http://tinyurl.com/p9bbycn>.

Ben O'Meara, a self-taught blacksmith and perhaps the most amazing of them all in his all too short lifetime. Tragically his career ended when he was killed in a plane crash on April 16, 1966 at the age of 27. Rodney Jenkins, my mentor, and perhaps the most well rounded rider, horseman ever. The list goes on and on.....

Two current riders today that for me display not only great riding but exemplify the Forward Seat are Canada's Eric Lamaze and Holland's Gerco Schroder. In conclusion, George Morris said to me recently that the riding style of the world is coming our way. Watching the riders in the final of the 2013 Global Champions Tour in Qatar stamped his statement! 🇩🇪



Bertalan de Nemethy



Captain Vladimir S. Littauer



Gordon Wright



Bill Steinkraus



Bernie Traurig



George Morris



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