

It takes two to Tango

BY SIMA FARES

Dressage is said to be the art of riding itself.

It is a rider's introduction to the Equestrian sport.

Then why isn't it gaining enough popularity in Egypt?

To read you need to know your ABC's quite well. First you begin reading a few words, then you advance your way into sentences and paragraphs. Finally you recognize letters easily and can speak without stuttering. The same goes for dressage. To ride, one needs to know the basic core of the true horsemanship and master it before advancing into another level. Dressage is basic yet comprehensive, simple yet advanced. It should be as precious to a rider as the holy book is in a shrine.

After being able to read for a while, comes the different method of pronunciation. Whether your dialect is British, American or Australian, you are still speaking English. The same applies for the equestrian sport; whether you jump, race or hunt, you are still riding.

Dressage is considered to be the heart of the sport itself. To understand horsemanship - defined as the relationship between horse and rider - every rider needs to know the why, how, when and where of the horse. Horse and rider need to work in complete unity, accepting one another in harmony. Sounds convincing enough - then why does dressage attract only a minority of riders in Egypt?

Several riding schools abroad, insist that new riders should cover an adequate period of basic training to fully understand and be in complete control of all the horse's paces. Then ground pole work can be introduced gradually before any attempt to begin showjumping. Some riders accept willingly, while some impatient others always manage to find some other alternative to advance up the equestrian ladder faster. Late dressage specialist, General Youseff Ghourab, supported the theory of a strong dressage base to all riders' career - like a well-supported skeleton, which will carry the body around effectively, and for longer. His school of thought and diverse theories are still remembered by all those lucky enough riders who have been taught by him in the past.



Dressage today is certainly evolving in some way or the other here in Egypt, but in the slow lane. Both riders and spectators tend to categorize it as a monotonous sport, held down by replay of its routines. But still there must be some bright side to it after all! Dressage cannot just be so popular abroad, but just another way for the not so courageous showjumpers to ride and compete here in Egypt.

And so the Egyptian Equestrian Federation steps in...

To promote and encourage dressage in Egypt, the federation began by training qualified persons to judge the dressage competitions. Then they announced at the start of last season (97/98), that any rider participating in dressage competitions will have those points gained, added to their overall seasonal performance. **Good thinking; thumbs up for the federation!** And so two different levels of dressage were designed. This attracted a large number of riders, and got them to work more on the flat with their horses, in order to be able to perform in the competitions.

So after the first dressage season, a very fruitful one indeed, the federation comes up with yet another dressage promoting gesture for the summer season. This time it was compulsory on all showjumpers to ride dressage as well, or else their points were not valid. That certainly got some of the higher-grade riders protesting, but the federation had its rules made and they were not to be broken. Logically enough, a dressage horse is trained to work his muscles in a different way than a showjumper, and the same applies to the riders as well. But what other choice was there? Riders reluctantly agreed to abide by the rules, except for some hard headed others, who refused to enter the competitions in the first place.

The success of any sport or activity involving two parties basically means that each must really want to work and cooperate with the other. However hard other people try to influence, push, encourage or dissuade them, it will never work without the total consent of both parties involved.

Watching two dancers together is always a beautiful sight. They complete each other and move as one unit. Alone, a dancer will not perform as well. Why?

Because

"It takes TWO to Tango."

This article is dedicated to the memory of Gen. Yoseff Ghorab