THE ART OF CLASSICAL DRESSAGE RIDING

THE TRAINING SCALE PART 2

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IN THE WINTER ISSUE OF HT (44) WE EMAAD ZAGHLOUL EXPLAINED THE IMPORTANTACE OF GOOD TRAINING AND THE BASE TO BECOME A GOOD DRESSAGE RIDER. IN THIS ISSUE HE CONTINUES WITH THE SECOND PART OF THE TRAINING SCALE AND EXPLAINS HOW IT WORKS.

HOW THE TRAINING SCALE WORKS:

The elements of the training scale describe the essence of dressage training whether you are working at backing a 3-year-old or perfecting your piaffe-passage transitions. Any problems encountered during training, provided they are not due to physical or psychological problems, can be traced to a weak link among the building blocks of training.

The first and most important building block is rhythm. Because rhythm is at the base of the pyramid, you cannot be focused on improving straightness if the rhythm at any gait is poor. In fact, you cannot be entirely focused on suppling exercises (building block #2) if the rhythm is poor. Likewise, you cannot be entirely focused on contact (building block #3) if the horse is tight and tense (absence of suppleness). The key to adopting the Training Scale is to understand how each block or element is related to the next.

Training Scenario #1: Let us assume you have been trying to teach your horse shoulder-in. As you trot up the long side of the arena, the trot becomes sluggish, the horse stiffens, offers you the neck instead of the shoulder, and goes above the bit. It is a mistake to jump to the conclusion that the horse is resistant. Okay, he may be resistant, but not necessarily due to stubbornness. Let's examine all the things that went wrong:

-The horse lost impulsion caused by lack of response to the rider's leg (no contact) and/or tension of the back (no suppleness). No suppleness and contact lead to no impulsion.

-The horse became stiff in the neck and jaw means an absence of suppleness.

-The horse went above the bit means an absence of contact with the rider's hands, legs, and seat, also leading to loss of impulsion.

LET US LOOK AT THE TRAINING SCALE ONCE MORE:

Rhythm
Suppleness
Contact
Impulsion
Straightness
Collection

The above scenario describes an absence of suppleness, which lead to loss of contact and impulsion. The rider had been trying to teach the horse a movement that is impossible to perform if the first four elements of the training scale are not established. Because the horse was initially stiff, it was physically impossible for him to offer a correct shoulder-in. In this situation, the rider must go back to developing the horse's suppleness, and try to establish a more confirmed contact.

Training Scenario #2: You have been struggling to get your horse on the bit in the trot. You heard that lots of impulsion from the hindquarters helps bring the horse on the bit, so you chase the horse around the arena, sponging, see-sawing, vibrating, and restraining the bit with your hands. The horse drops his back, stiffens more every time you kick him forward, and throws his nose up higher. Furthermore, the trot becomes uneven, and the horse starts short-stepping with one foreleg, almost resembling a lame horse. What is going on?

- The horse was becoming stiffer and more tense in the jaw. The absence of suppleness has made the presence of contact impossible.

-The horse was also stiffening against the rider's leg, which was asking for impulsion during the absence of suppleness and contact.

-The rider's struggles with contact during the absence of suppleness created loss of rhythm in the trot, resulting in what is called, "rein-lameness".

The rider had been trying to bring a horse on the bit when the horse was not supple and loose, therefore not mentally or physically ready to accept contact. As the rider struggles with contact in the absence of suppleness, the trot rhythm is also sacrificed, and the entire training structure collapses. In this situation, the rider must abandon all attempts to force contact upon the horse, and simply try to re-establish true rhythm while relaxing the horse. 😄

Collection
Straightness
Impulsion
Contact
Suppleness
Rhythm