

## Sometimes Size Does Matter!

(posted 9-16-10)

It amuses me when I hear of riders who say their horse just can't perform in a small arena. Sure, non-eventors are used to the 20 by 60 standard arena, but even a 17-plus hand horse will fit in the smaller one if he's well ridden, and sometimes, the more limited confines actually make it easier to keep them together.

In the old days when you went to judge a breed restricted dressage show, you weren't always sure just what you'd encounter. There are stories of judges asking the management as the show was ready to commence, "Where are the test sheets?" and the puzzled organizer replying blankly, "Test sheets?" At various shows the same sort of answer met the judge's query about the letters, the scribe, or even about the existence of an arena itself. Judges were known to recruit a parent to write out scores on a blank tablet while someone rushed to the drugstore to make Xeroxes of tests or to steal poles from the jump field to make a ring.

I personally arrived at the Mass Morgan Show one Sunday morning to find an anomaly just for me. This was a huge show that lasted a week with thousands of competitors, but the dressage was a tiny little afterthought in a distant field to appease a vocal niche of their membership. The morning fog was lifting as I unpacked my briefcase. The arena was on grass—no problem. The boundaries were white chains on stakes—OK there too. But while the arena was a standard 20 meters wide and all the letters were proportionately the right distance apart, the arena literally looked long enough to land a Cessna in it, or if you could keep it straight, to hit a pretty good 3 wood. Upon investigation, I learned that the job of setting it up had been assigned to the organizer's two non-riding teenage sons. "The chain's in the back of the pick up," they were told. They had NOT been told that there was enough chain for four arenas, so they'd just used it all!

I often dream of what I'd do if I were rich—like win-the-Super-Powerball-jackpot rich. I think the first thing I'd do is buy a nuclear submarine but only if I could have the missiles too. And to keep my wife happy, I'd donate a pile of it to save some whales. Then (because you can't please everyone, you've got to please yourself) I'd do something big for dressage. I'd start by looking up a realtor in one of those "I" states—Iowa or Indiana or Illinois. Kansas or Nebraska would do, for that matter. And I'd buy three contiguous sections of land. A great big rectangular chunk, three miles by one mile on a side. Then I'd buy 12 triple wide mobile homes, paint them white, stand them on their ends, and put the letters on them. Henceforth, when airliners flew over at 36,000 feet on their way to The Coast, the passengers would see a perfectly proportioned dressage arena laid out below them. With my helpful intervention, I'm betting dressage could become as mainstream popular as the sea urchin at Beni Hana's!