

## **Trick or Tweet!**

### **(And other Judge's Comments)**

(posted 10-7-10)

I was judging a schooling show when a youngish teenager appeared from the nearby hunter ring to try her hand at dressage. In the middle of Training Test Four, her horse indiscreetly exited over the side boards at the canter. Her coach/reader tried to talk her soothingly back to a modicum of control, but the horse just kept cantering, now along the outside of the arena towards me.

I climbed out from my booth hurriedly, spread my arms, and called, "If you have to, aim him here. He'll stop when he gets to me."

In fact, by C she had gotten him stopped, but she looked very miserable.

"So by now," I ventured, "I'll bet you're a combination of pretty aggravated and mortified, huh?"

"Yes," she sniffled.

We commiserated briefly over this state of affairs, and she went ahead and finished her test. When I climbed back into the booth, I sat for a moment wondering exactly what advice I could write below the Collective Marks that would do her the most good. Thinking over the Twitter kid-craze (of which I am not a part), I decided the best solution was to dive in head-first with my first informal tweet.

The sheet she got back said: "OMG NBD UROK!"

I hope she was cheered up.

I've been told by a few coaches that my slightly unconventional comments on the test sheets make their students more inclined to run pick up their tests to see what I've written to them. If my remarks are a little obscure and require an after-the-fact explanation, well, that's always all right with me too.

At one competition I was sitting in the show office eating my Sunday lunch when a trainer strolled in trailed by several of her students.

"Mr. Woods, can we ask you a question?"

"Sure."

Reflexively, the paranoid show manager interrupted, “NO, you can’t ask him until the end of the show!”

“Well, that’s not quite true,” I said. “What kind of question is it?”

“We’ve been discussing what you meant on the bottom of this girl’s test,” the trainer answered.

“THAT I’m allowed to answer,” I replied. “What does it say?”

“Under the Collectives you wrote: *Much better second half. Technicolor after your house landed on the witch!* What does that mean?”

“What do YOU think it means?” I countered.

“Um, that the first part was dull and the last part of the test was brighter?” offered one kid.

“Yup, you’re on the right track,” I encouraged.

“Does it have something to do with the color of her breeches?” asked another.

“Noooo! The movie! It’s about the movie. Remember? The cyclone carries the farm house to Oz, it kills the Wicked Witch, and when Dorothy opens the door, the black and white movie turns into a color one!

And suddenly they all “got” it, nodded in unison, and went off happy.

When I judge, I might take a few more liberties with my comments when I know the rider, or more importantly, when they know me and aren’t too likely to be offended.

After one rider’s drag-me-around test where her horse contested her strength (and won) from start to finish, I wrote:

*“If a tree falls in the forest, it falls on your horse,*

*and she doesn’t notice, did you really make a half halt?”*

Another comment I have always wanted to make is reserved for a self confident, accomplished rider—a Kyle Carter, Darren Chiachia, Lesley Law—who has just finished one of those self-evidently less-than-successful tests that produce a sheepish smile and a shrug from the rider at the concluding salute:

*“Son, you can’t handle the truth!”*

. . . If only I could phoneticize Jack's delivery!