

Not McDonalds Again!

I fell into conversation with an imperious young member of the Wellington chapter of Dressage Queens in Training. She thought rather highly of her opinions, and seemed impatient with anyone who wasn't on a first name basis with Anky. Or who couldn't afford a made Grand Prix horse.

I personally am delighted to teach people who can have such horses, but the life-experience a rider gains working with an ordinary horse or an aged schoolmaster of limited scope can be just as valuable, don'tcha know?

The woman under discussion was scribbling for me at the time, and my comment about a rider forgetting her outside leg in a shoulder-in and her inside leg in the travers set her off on a lecture about Anky von Grunsven's seminar after the Palm Beach Masters.

"Anky says she never uses her inside leg in a half pass," she noted.

My reaction was this: What anyone uses for aids has to be situationally-defined. Maybe her international horses are enough in front of her leg and on her seat that the effect of the inside leg can be assumed without being overtly stated. But not to use the inside leg in that movement isn't advice I'd be spreading around to typical riders learning to make a half pass happen with an honest bend through the horse's body. Several tests earlier, I pointed out, we had witnessed a horse falling sideways through the half pass and getting to the centerline much too soon. If ever there was an example of a rider needing the modifying inner leg to keep her horse thinking forward and connected into the outside rein, that had been it!

Fortunately, I recalled a story in one of the dressage books on my shelf that could put all this in context: Douglas Adams's **The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy**. In it, he posits three stages in the development of civilization, stages which have their parallel in the development of a rider's understanding of a horse being on the aids. Adams's first stage is Survival, when Man asks "How will we eat?" The second stage is Philosophical. Man poses the question: "WHY do we eat?" The third developmental stage is Practical—the ultimate question: "Where shall we have lunch today?"

Anky's comment about the half pass was clearly delivered with her head in Phase Three. It doesn't make it untrue, but its relevance to ordinary people with ordinary problems of the Phase One and Two variety may be limited. Picking the right dressage bistro is worth some thought in your spare time, but getting to G with the horse bent ought to be a higher priority for most of us in real life.