

## Getting in Shape

(posted 11-16-10)

It's an endless struggle to persuade students and people we judge to attend to the geometry of their arena figures. Usually they just have too many other things on their minds. Once in a while I'm betting this behavior springs from an unconscious Libertarian rebellion against authority.

As a beaten-down-over-the-years realist, it never surprises me when riders don't know the dimensions of the arena they school and show in.

"How many meters is it from X to I or from B to R?" I ask.

"Ten? No, 20 . . . no, wait, uh, eight!"

And so on. You can guess it's pretty hard to sculpt correct figures if you can't visualize the marks you should be aiming for.

A clever clinic student of mine, Denika Voget, offers a theoretical solution for instructors at their wits' end. She proposes an extensive battery of ceiling-mounted lasers—like the hand-held ones that your cat plays with—which could project correct arena figures onto the footing below. You want your rider to perform an accurate 15 meter circle? Punch it into your remote and presto, the laser beams produce the pathway for her to follow! Certainly it would save a lot of boot leather if the instructor no longer needs to drag her heel around the ring to mark the track she wants her student on.

Some riders are more self-aware than others. I overheard a Training Level rider explain philosophically to her coach as she exited the show ring, "I may not make very round circles, but I can sure cut those corners pretty well!"

And this: Not long ago I got to teach a woman for the first time about whom I'd written in Dressage *Unscrambled*. The one married to the circus guy who threatened to feed her learning-challenged high school horse to the Big Cats—and then, ironically, the Big Cats ate HIM. Susan had taught this lady back then, but this was my first personal introduction to her and her riding.

Being a "performer" and not a competitor, she didn't know much about standard arena figures. In trying to explain to her where to cross the centerline on the 20 meter circle between B and E, I said, "Just imagine your ex is lying with his feet at I or L, and ride over his forehead.

"This should be easy," she says to me, "I've had four of them!"