

## Take a Chance, Take a Chance

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During a training session one of my less-experienced students observed, “Just when you tell me my canter is really good, I lose it.”

“You’re right,” I replied, “do you know why?”

This is the juncture when many students invoke the old Marine Corps query, “Why do so many Marines (dressage riders) have stooped shoulders and sloped foreheads?” The answer is that when you ask them why they should do something, they shrug their shoulders and go, “Uh, U uh.” Then after you tell them, they slap themselves in the head a la Homer Simpson and go, “Oh, duh!”

The answer to my pupil’s canter situation was that to improve it, she had to learn to take her horse’s front-to-back balance right to the edge of what he could sustain. He could canter around endlessly on the forehand chasing his center of gravity, but to rock him back onto his hindquarters, maintain the rhythm and tempo, slow down his progress over the ground, and invite him to carry himself involves finding different timing and a new relationship—one that, until it becomes familiar, will be filled with fits and starts and momentary glitches. Until you can feel just how much you can get away with asking, you’re bound to accidentally make him break sometimes.

Trust me—this is NORMAL!

When you ride near the edge, you will invariably tip over that edge from time to time. If you are philosophical about it and just try again, you’ll find the new solutions much faster than if you never make the venture. Most horses are amazingly tolerant if you have to bumble along for a while as you and he find his new and better canter. As long as you keep your cool and make sure you can go back and reproduce the pure, basic gait when you want to—and keep him in it—you’ll be fine. Then you should feel free to “bumble away!”