

*So what should I make of all those "How to" articles in the dressage magazines?*

The best thing that a magazine article can do for you is to crystallize into coherence a thought or feeling that you've already brushed up against. I think it's quite rare that you'll pick up an article, find some brand new principle, and—boom—just make it a part of your consciousness.

That's why I am most suspicious of those elaborate, multi-columned screeds with complicated, arrowed diagrams of footfalls. Any article that begins with "Just remember these eleven things . . ." is apt to be trouble. Likewise, most articles that over-intellectualize or over-mechanize a process which we want to become a *feeling* are not the kind I recommend.

Years ago I asked Frau Rosemary Springer on which beat of the canter should I ask for the flying change. She eyed me curiously and asked why I wanted to know.

"So I can do it correctly," I replied ingenuously.

"Knowing won't help you one bit," she answered. She went on to explain the following: On average, every 60 seconds, a typical horse takes 90-plus canter strides. Each stride includes three hoof beats and a silent "beat," the period of suspension. That means 6 "beats" per second or one beat every 0.167 seconds. So even if you know which beat you want to give the aid on, can you realistically find that tiny fraction of a second when you're supposed to do it? The answer is no. You give the aid when you *feel* the right time, as you hips come forward in sync with the horse's movement, not when your left brain counts out the correct instant. You learn the feel by trial and error, hopefully on a horse that already knows the drill and who will reward you with a clean change when you get it right.

This is not to say that I'm negative about having you read things. I know this book, for instance . . .

All that aside, if reading 1) distills some fuzzy ideas into graspable words or 2) causes you to fall out of your comfort zone with the awareness that there's something out there that you have yet to grasp, then the article will have done its job.