

*Do you find dressage varies very much in different parts of the country?*

As I travel around the country to judge and teach, I see riding which varies greatly in quality and style. But there are not particular *regional* styles or degrees of proficiency. Everywhere the degree of talent and skill I see mirrors the pyramidal structure of the numbers of riders showing at each level. The lower level riders form the base. Generally, there are fewer participants as horses climb through the levels. In a populous area where the whole pyramid is large, the breadth at the higher levels reflects that greater number who began at the bottom. In remote areas where the base is small, the top is similarly small although the overall shape of the pyramid is approximately the same.

Variations are much more detectable in smaller samples. At one show when a succession of junior riders passed before me all with low, set hands and locked elbows, I was not surprised that the program revealed they had all come from the same stable. I've already recounted discovering the trainer who was telling all his students that riding on contact was supposed to be like waterskiing. Small wonder they appeared to have all popped out of the same misbegotten mold!

In very out-of-the-way locales one or two particular judges may carry an inordinate influence if the only show manager in town hires them again and again. If those judges happen to be out of the mainstream, they may steer that area's riders into some shark-filled waters.

For the most part, however, the constant flow of professionals back and forth across the country (I'm writing this from an airport, btw), makes the differences from one place to another about as great as what you experience when you walk into a distant Olive Garden or La Quinta instead of the one near your home.