

“I Don’t Understand!”

There’s stuff that *nobody* understands—the leveraged derivative market, for example. Then there are times when you’re left all alone, hanging out there, with a question mark floating over your head. Everyone “gets it” but you. Three examples:

A woman was riding her coming-four, very green warmblood at a recent clinic with me. She was not a novice but hadn’t dealt with many youngsters. They were getting ready for Training Level together, and we were working on confirming a civilized canter. On the 20-meter circle the mare’s idea was to counter-balance against her rider and bulge through the outside shoulder. Our audience, composed of other riders, numbered about a half dozen.

As the pair went sailing around, I kept calling out various versions of “make her straight” and “let go of her.” During one orbit the rider blurted out to me, “I can’t let go. My half halt won’t work!”

This elicited a most delightful (to my ears) and spontaneous gasp: “Ewwwwwww” from the watchers. In that instant they had recognized the irony (as the rider had not) that the very reason the half halt didn’t work was that the rider would not let go of the mare’s mouth long enough to let her look for an independent balance. My rider had just articulated both the problem AND THE SOLUTION without recognizing it!



They all “got” it!

Another woman I know had been regaling her co-workers with tales of her preparation to show PSG for the first time. Her office mates were polite listeners but hardly what you’d call knowledgeable about the finer points of dressage.

After her debut had been completed successfully, a fellow who’d been overhearing all this conversation around the water cooler stopped her in the hallway and said, “So now that you’ve done this ‘pre-St. George thing,’ when do you get to do the *real* St. George?”

Misunderstandings befall me, too. I try to play the role of experienced, worldly dressage master, but at heart I am just a country bumpkin. I was teaching a clinic in Costa Rica, and my hosts had supplied me with an Excel printout of the lesson schedule each day and the explanation that other than a new person at the end of the day, I would know all the riders and horses.

Looking down the list I could picture most of them and what we had worked on during my last visit: Jose on the gray Andalusian at 8 o’clock, Birgitta on her mare at 8:45, and so on. But I was totally stumped by the 12 p.m. entry on the schedule. I wracked my brain. Al? . . . Al? I just didn’t remember teaching any “Almuerzo” before. Who the heck was he?

Eventually someone explained to me that *almuerzo* is Spanish for “lunch.”