

## Dope Slap, Please!

I was judging a recognized show at a college up north, and some of the riders were college students on horses from the school's lesson program. One young woman was in the midst of a First Level test when the horse she'd been assigned got a bit over enthusiastic at what should have been the end of a canter lengthening. A lengthening that he chose not to end. As he sailed around the short end of the arena and kept cruising, his rider locked up, zoned out, and braced against her horse's jaw. He wasn't racing with her, but they had reached a sort of stasis that could have gone on a long time. After a few unscheduled canter circles, I stood up, and diplomatically (or not) shouted at her, "So for heaven's sake, STOP ALREADY!" At which point she reflexively gave the horse one good, sharp meaningful tug, and he came right back to walk.

Being able to keep your wits about you and finding a way to self-clear your cobwebs in moments of extremis is a skill that might not be easy to acquire, but a good rule of thumb is *do something*—don't abdicate, don't acquiesce. Something—anything—is usually better than benign passivity.

Along the lines of "doing something," I have observed that over many years of competing, no judge has ever written or told me that when something has been going wrong that I've done too much or been too obvious in dealing with it. There's a natural tendency (especially if you're a hunt seat equitation refugee) to try to cover up problems. In a sense that's part of showmanship. But a good rider knows "when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em." Covering up the obvious in front of a discerning judge is pointless. Better that you should tacitly acknowledge that something is going awry and make the size half halt or reinforcing aid that fixes it. The judge will be much happier that you did something constructive rather than just have let the situation rattle along to its unenviable denouement.