

Several Pickles Short (of a Picnic)

We denizens of The Human Condition are all subject to moments when reason and logic take flight. Attribute it to information overload if you like. My first examples are just tiny pills on the otherwise-smooth sweater of life.

I was teaching a woman on a wise old school horse. To prevent his anticipating the next movement, I spelled to her slowly, “H—A—L—T.” Nothing happened. After a few more trips around the arena, I inquired, “So, what about the halt?” Her answer: “Oh, sorry, I was looking for letter T.”

In another lesson as a student halted her mare, I told her, “Right front leg is forward.”

“Hers or mine?” she asked without thinking.

“Um, Karen, actually you don’t have front legs,” I reminded her (helpfully). “On you, we would call those arms.”

Other times the picnic is more in jeopardy. One of my more endearing [read “eccentric”] students (You might remember her from **Dressage Unscrambled** as the one who set the llama on fire.) has been doing PSG this winter. It’s a “work in progress,” but since it allows her to wear her shadbelly, she doesn’t care. At a recognized show a few weeks ago, she was in the middle of her canter work when the judge blew the whistle. Calling her up to the booth, the judge said, “This line is supposed to be 4 tempis. You were doing threes.”

“Oh,” said Betty, “those *were* my fours. My three tempis are *really* bad!”

In a (you’ll see) related matter, last weekend I was judging the dressage phase of a horse trials. As is often the case this time of year, some riders move their horses up to jump the bigger fences and figure their dressage will catch up with them later in the season. As the tests are written in eventing dressage, when a halt-rein back is required, the judge gives two scores: one for the halt itself and a second score for the RB and move off.

As one rider came around the arena before her test, she stopped in front of me and announced, “When I try to make my horse rein back, he rears and runs backwards and then stays upset for the rest of the test. So I’m going to skip the rein back this time.”

I shrugged my OK. “Looks like a One or Zero coming up,” I told my scribe.

The rider came around the ring one more time before the bell (duck call), and I stopped her. “May I make a suggestion?” I asked. “When you make your halt, ask the video guy here to move letter C a few meters forward. Then it will look like you’ve made a rein back!”

A few days later, I related this story to Betty and she exclaimed, “How could someone admit to the judge that she couldn’t do one of the required movements!”

“Wait a minute,” I pointed out, “that’s what you did too.”

“Well,” she said with mild indignation, “at least I waited till the middle of the test!”

Here’s one more to marvel at, although its connection to dressage is somewhat tenuous. I used to do clinics in Vermont, and on one occasion the organizer’s husband picked me up at the airport. He was a commercial pilot who flew for a major airline,

having worked his way up from flying as Second Officer for an inconsequential (now defunct) regional carrier. In the airport he ran into an old acquaintance to whom he introduced me—Dave Somebody-or-Other who had been the chief pilot where he used to work. After a few pleasantries, we all went on our way, and as we climbed into the car, my friend said to me, “That was Shaky Dave.”

A quizzical look from me elicited this tale.

Dave used to fly the same route all the time up and down the St. Lawrence River and Seaway in deHavilland Twin Otters. A one way trip involved landings and takeoffs at seven separate airstrips at small towns along the route. A roundtrip meant 14 landings and takeoffs, and Dave did this multiple times per day, probably for weeks on end.

With a load of passengers on board, one late evening on his last approach at the western terminus of his route, Dave stunned his copilot by reaching overhead and shutting down the port engine—a *most* unconventional act! The powerless prop freewheeled in the slipstream, and Dave proceeded to set the plane down and taxi to the terminal. As the ground crew was setting the chocks and the passengers got ready to disembark, the shaken copilot turned to him, and in a small voice, asked, “Uh, Dave? Why did you do that?”

His empty pickle jar answer: “Because I thought I was *at the gate!*”

