

It's No Crime to Be Anti-Semantic

The words we choose matter, especially when we sit at C as judges. At Judges Forums we are advised to be cogent, brief, meaningful, and oh yes, conventional. We all know there are some words that should only be applied in certain circumstances. For instance, we can't say a Training Level horse should be more collected because collection doesn't become a requirement until Second Level. We can't say a walk lacks cadence because, by definition, cadence only may be applied to gaits which have suspension—trot and canter.

But there are gray areas. At a recent forum the question was raised as to whether Training and First Level horses can be described as “needing more self carriage.” The answer was yes. Self carriage is a relative thing. The degree demanded in the FEI is far more than what is sought in the lower levels. Nonetheless, a rudimentary form of self carriage is an appropriate quality to seek with lower level horses.

Then came the question of an “uphill balance.” We were told that horses aren't expected to become uphill until Second Level. It says so in the Purpose on the test sheet. However, I like to use the expression “needs to be more uphill” or “develop uphill tendency.” I think it's an image that novice riders can relate to better than when I talk about engagement or lightening the forehand.

When told that I shouldn't request an uphill balance, my reaction was this:

We all agree that we don't want the horse to be on the forehand or downhill. Any amount the horse is able to be rebalanced to become less downhill, by definition, is making him *more uphill*. OK, he's not literally “uphill” until the process has matured into collection, but in the meantime, a change you make along the continuum of back to front balance IS making him more uphill—more than he was before.

Does this sound a little silly? Judges in forums spend a lot of time discussing these “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin” type questions. It could make you crazy—at least until the drugs kick in.

As a sidebar we were told that while we should ask not for an “uphill balance” in the lower levels, we could ask the horses to demonstrate a “level balance.” To me, this adds a confusion factor. “Level” already refers to a quality of the horse's gaits. A correct trot is supposed to be regular, even, and level, “level” referring to the horse lifting equally high with each front leg or each hind leg—a symmetrical way of going. If pressed, I would much prefer the term “horizontal balance” in order to stay away from that use of the same term in entirely different contexts.



