

## When the Parade Passes By

A student of mine has a friend—also a rider—who gave up eventing to compete in dressage. Her horse is showing in the FEI levels, and she reported the following: While eventing dressage judges used to mark her horse's trot down for being "too passage-y," regular dressage judges seem to reward her for it.

I suggested that she might be misinterpreting their remarks. When she evented, even if it was at the Intermediate level, that's only equivalent to Second Level dressage. Had she been showing a passage-y trot at First and Second Levels in regular dressage classes, most judges would have been marking her lower there as well. We've all seen those vector diagrams that illustrate differing amounts of forward *thrust* versus upward *lift* that define Collected, Working, and Medium Trot, and we know that the vector picture changes as the horse graduates from level to level. Simply stated, to fulfill the lower level requirement, the ground-covering aspect of the working gaits is of primary importance. In the upper levels of dressage, as long as the trot doesn't cross the line into "hovering," an increased amount of lift will be encouraged. As this woman shifted disciplines, she also progressed to a level where collection is rewarded.

This said, I remember seeing the fabulous mare Brentina when Debbie McDonald was competing her in PSG, I think in the late '90s. Her Collected Trot *did* have more of a passage-y tendency than I would have liked, but she was just passing through on the way to Grand Prix and actual passage.

Kyra Kyrklund tells the story of training her first International horse, Matador, back in the '80s. He was about six years old when she began introducing him to passage. As she recalls, laughing, "Once he got it, it was the only thing he wanted to do for about six months!" She didn't really care, however, because her goal was to make him GP, not to win year end awards level by level.

This brings up an aspect of training that you may not have thought about. Are you familiar with the "Parade of Homes" which various associations of realtors arrange in areas all around the country? If such an activity were conducted like a dressage show, the entrants would be presented like this:

Training Level: the lot would be cleared, the foundation would be poured. Then construction would cease. Everything would be spruced up and put in "show condition." Flowers would be planted, a lawn would be installed and manicured. The judges would be invited to look on and make their comments. Ribbons would be awarded.

Then on Monday, construction would resume. When the house's progress reached First Level, everything was grind to a halt again. Now the studs would be up, maybe the rafters too, but no dry wall, no wiring. But once again to make the house show-able, every speck of dust and debris would be picked up and again the site would be elaborately landscaped.

You can see this wouldn't be the most efficient way to get a house finished, but if you built one the typical Dressage Competition way, that's how it would have to be done! Dressage itself hasn't always been this way. Even though our sport is a good 450

years old (depending on when you start counting), dressage shows have only existed for less than the last 100. And then they were only for cavalry officers. If you were a woman, of course, you weren't in the equation at all.

Trainers who aren't bound by the strictures of level by level competition can bring the various elements of a horse's training along on a very individual schedule. Yes, the principles of the Training Pyramid still apply, but if one gait or one category of movements gets far ahead of the rest, it doesn't matter. Eventually all the parts come together when the horse is "finished."

This applies on a more tactical level, too, though I wouldn't recommend it in most teacher/pupil/horse relationships. For all three participants to be on the same page, a linear, neatly structured approach to training works better. But when training alone or with a particularly insightful, intuitive student, it is OK to follow more "stream of consciousness" lines of thought. You may be working on one concept, but if by chance or design the horse offers you something else—whether it's half steps or a flying change—that you can use later on, why not take advantage?

As long as you don't have "to show the house" the next day, it won't get you in any trouble.