

Two Hats Are Better than One

Wearing my trainer's hat, I may say to a rider of a certain type of horse—one who is sluggish and rather loath to articulate his joints or more than perfunctorily swing his limbs—go ahead and over-pace him a bit. Speed isn't impulsion, but getting any kind of energy output is better than none.

Wearing my judge's hat, if in a test the horse's tempo exceeds the window of acceptability, I may say "Hurried. Needs slower tempo to acquire cadence and swing."

As a coach I must walk the fine line. *A little rapidity* is usually tolerated by most judges, and it comes across better than a funereal performance. But judges see themselves as "keepers of the flame," and they come down pretty hard on riders who appear to have the basic concepts screwed up!

Donning my judge's hat again, I may know why a rider has made a tactical choice (and I may even agree with it), but if the result doesn't conform to my mental picture of a 7 or an 8, I can't reward it with the same score that a correctly ridden movement earns.

I hear a voice from the wilderness crying, *When competitors read comments on their tests like, "running, too quick," they think, "OK, I've got to slow down." However, what happens next?*

They pull the horse into a frame and, then, because he lacks the strength for actual collection, and CORRECT slow work, the horse starts doing nothing with the hind legs, and the connection is lost.

Now I may be a dreamer (but I'm not the only one). It's my impression that (trainer's hat re-installed) my duties include interpreting the judge's comments to my riders in a way that they don't draw the wrong conclusion. Choosing a given tempo is a tactical matter. Pulling the horse together is not, and in practical terms that's why often the so called "Collected Trot" of Second Level seeks to demonstrate more of an enhanced buoyancy in a Working tempo, unlike an FEI level Collected Trot where power, lift, and engagement can be displayed even if the tempo is slowed slightly.

In my last post, *When the Parade Passes By*, I mentioned the peculiar nature of showing—that it DOES call for a seemingly arbitrary snapshot which isn't necessarily in the linear progression of training a horse. Riders need to understand this.

They also need to recognize that the reason we say "there many roads to Rome," is that we figuratively begin our journey with some horses from Paris, with some from Madrid, and with others from Vladivostok or points further removed. That's why so many generic rider questions deserve that familiar trainer response, "IT DEPENDS!"

One constant through it all—fast, slow, in between, or even at a standstill—the horse has to be in front of the leg. If you never stray from this principle, you can't go too far wrong.