

## More than the Strong Survive

Novice Rider Lament Number One: “My legs get so tired!” Sometimes that’s because you’re riding a miserably ungenerous oink of a horse. But I’ve been on lots of horses whose riders had voiced that complaint, and the horses were easy. The first thing to ask yourself is: *Are you trying too hard?* Remember, horses respond to changes in pressure, not volumes of pressure. If you’re pinching and gripping with your legs constantly, not only are you communicating inefficiently, but you’re wearing yourself out with unnecessary isometric torture.

Kyra Kyrklund has a nice image. She likens the riding relationship to being on a sledge—a Finnish scooter-like thing that you push across the ice with one foot and then hop on and continue gliding. After a short distance, your leg re-propels it forward, but during all those gliding moments you rest. Result—you don’t get so tired.

Lament Number Two: “One of my legs isn’t as strong as the other!” My reaction: And your point is . . . ?

Hardly anybody is equally strong on both sides, but so what?

Almost everybody is strong *enough*. Maybe not a rider with a legitimate physical impairment. Maybe not the pet spider that Kevin Fitzgerald writes about: “*Doctor, he just seems not himself; he’s depressed!* How can you tell? *Well, for one thing his leg fell off yesterday.*” But for most everyone else, strength *per se* is not the issue.

You aren’t supposed to be using all your strength anyway. Once in a great while to make a truly lasting impression, but generally speaking, you should only employ a fraction of the maximum you have available.



In this photo you see two glasses. They represent the two sides of your horse, and note that they aren’t identical in size because horses, too, are asymmetrical and require a differential amount of leg on one side versus the other to achieve the same result. Imagine the pitchers are your two legs. They aren’t the same size because your

legs aren't equal in the available strength they can muster. But either pitcher can easily fill its glass with plenty left over.

The point is that being innately stronger on one side doesn't matter. Suppose my left leg's strength goes to ten on a scale of ten while my right one maxes out at eight. If in my normal riding my legs are operating in the 2.5 to 5.5 range, the amount of reserve that I'm not using isn't really an issue.

Besides, if you really need more responsiveness, the key is to put your horse more on the aids so that he's quick and sharp and thoughtful. There are artificial aids like whips and spurs to help you out, but the best tools are repetition and reinforcement. That way he learns to do the work, not you!