

If You Take the Bucks, There's No Free Pass

“Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

That's my reaction to a lot of amateur riding that I saw at a dressage show recently. There was also some very good riding by both amateurs, juniors, and professionals, I might add, but for the moment, let's focus on the not so good. In my book the novices get a pass. As long as they demonstrate kindness and good intention, they're allowed to screw up because that's within the nature of learning.

My greater concern might be for the volunteers and other watchers who could be led seriously astray by copying the bad advice I heard being ladled out by some coaches and trainers in the warm-up arena. If you want to jump off a cliff, that's your business. If you're in the business of leading the lemming parade, you should be held accountable. If you take the bucks, you don't get a free pass to be dumb!

A few quick examples:

I watched one trainer for minutes on end advising a kid to “hold, hold, hold” while the poor horse braced, braced, braced. Self carriage? Freedom? Reward within the frame? Not in this lifetime!

I listened to another instructor whose sole solution to producing acceptance whenever the rider's horse was long or flat was to raise the inside hand till he got “rounder.” Anything about legs? Coordinated aids? Bending? Nope. Lift your hand—that'll do the trick.

And a few meters away I observed yet another conjurer making Collection in which the gaits became first blurred, then unclear, and then truly damaged to the point of Insufficiency. So much for the physician's decree “*Primum non nocere.*”

“What can be done about this?” you might ask. The USEF has figured out how to legislate against cruelty, but thus far, there are no viable laws against bad riding, bad advice, or for that matter, against ignorance and stupidity in general. This has been tried in the past [See *Ex.20.1-17* and *Deut .5.1-21*], and you can see how far that's gotten the world!