

Shopping Around

You can find lots of people who are critical of “rollkur,” the training technique espoused by Uwe Schulten-Baumer and brought to prominence internationally by his students Nicole Uphoff and Isabel Werth. Schooling in extreme hyper-flexion has served the Dutch well also—first by Anky van Grunsven, more recently by World Champion Edward Gal with Totilas and his teammate and bronze medalist Imke Bartels.

You can find numerous critiques on all levels of this practice. How, when done for prolonged periods, it is physically harmful to the horses: restricting their breathing and their vision and by placing unnatural stresses on their back muscles. The FEI has placed limits on how long it may be maintained by a rider at a competition warm-up arena. Beyond this, many traditionalists point to its obvious unclassical nature.

I am a pragmatist and an empiricist at heart, and usually a technique done in moderation and for a greater good doesn't ruffle me. Having watched in person rollkur be used and having observed all the fuss in the magazines and on-line, my reaction is more simple. It just doesn't conform to my image of how I want to relate to my horse. I can't picture having my wife in her burka walking obsequiously three steps behind me. To drill my horse in that exaggerated posture evokes much the same visceral reaction in me.



No can do.

On a different note, who isn't familiar with those racially insensitive creations of a bygone era—lawn jockeys? I'll spare you having to see the original black-faced caricature version. The pseudo-PC rendition [shown here] finds its way onto the lawns of suburban McMansions and McMansion wannabes. Ironically, their residents usually don't get any closer to our horse world than by owning a Hermes scarf.



Why would I want a little concrete jockey in my front yard anyway? I wouldn't. Since I already spend all my time with horses, I'd rather go a different route. On my lawn, I want a little stone businessman to remind me of a life that but for the grace of God might have been.