

## A Whiney Woman's Song

I used to teach a woman who couldn't decide what she was. On the one hand, she owned and rode a Grand Prix schoolmaster plus a fancy five year old son of a prominent warmblood stallion. She had a 20 by 60 meter indoor arena on her property, and she taught lessons for which she received normal monetary compensation. By the "if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck" measuring stick, that made her a professional.

At the same time, when she rode her young horse she would tend to whine and complain when he acted like—well, a young horse. He never did anything very bad, but he would get heavy and lean or pop a shoulder or miss a lead now and then. And this, in turn, would set off all sorts of novice amateur "oh-woe-is-me" histrionics.

While it's never pretty, some people are in that stage of life or in their riding where the picture she painted would be understandable. But not for someone clinging to the pretense I outlined in the lead paragraph. You have to choose, and I made this dissonance quite clear to her.

So we practiced Professionals Have to Act Like Professionals. The first drill was every time she felt irritated or frustrated by her horse's behavior, she had to say to herself (aloud) "That's interesting." No matter how egregious: "That's interesting." Rather like a biologist observing a rare bacterium through her microscope—dispassionate, unemotional.

Second, she had to adopt a whole new attitude towards her work. I called it Omniscient Condescension—all knowing, all seeing, and she as trainer above it all, her calm unshakeable.

In the baseball film *Bull Durham*, Kevin Costner as the wise old veteran counsels Tim Robbins, the headed-for-the-Show phenom, "You've got to play this game with fear and arrogance." Another great dressage quote!

He's not talking the kind of fear that a beginner rider has of falling off. He's talking the look-over-your-shoulder, someone might be trying to steal your job kind. The fear that drives you to achieve when otherwise it might be easier to stay in bed or to sit on the couch and crack open another beer. And arrogance—the boldness to face a 98 mile per hour fastball or an S judge fresh from presiding at Aachen.

We all construct our self image in one form or another, sometimes by accident. I'm suggesting that a well-crafted one will make your riding life a lot easier.