

***Advice to authors from legendary filmmaker, Billy Wilder:***

**“Don’t be too clever for an audience. Make it obvious.  
Make the subtleties obvious also.”**

Don’t underestimate the importance of establishing a consistent, stable contact with your horse. Beyond the shrinking subgroup that doesn’t even know you’re supposed to ride on contact, there’s another segment of the dressage population that thinks they’re doing it when they really aren’t.

The keys are not the weight in the reins itself but the mechanics of your elbows and shoulders which must learn to function automatically to meet the horse with an elastic, following feel. This “spring-load” but non-interfering sensation needs to carry on unconsciously because your riding mind has a lot of other fish to fry.

Put yourself in your horse’s situation for a moment. Remember those old black and white heartbreak movies from the ‘50s? Like him to that lonely sailor jammed into a cramped phone booth on a pier. He’s just shoved his fist quarters into the slot to call his girl back home. An ambiguous letter crumpled in his fist means some bad is afoot. He needs to know where he stands.

“Janey, yes, it’s me. I got your letter and . . .”

She begins to reply but the connection cuts in and out. Yes, she still loves him or, no, she doesn’t. It’s all getting lost in a jumble of static and drop phrases. His despair builds along with the hollow deep inside. The worst part is the frustration of just not knowing what she means.

So that’s more or less how your horse feels too when the rein contact comes and goes. Among novice riders, I see a bobble outside rein and a perplexed-looking horse way more often than I should. In fact, it’s one of the few occasions where I actually tell a student to lie down at her hands. If you aren’t aware of the problem, you can’t fix it. But my message here is how incredibly important it is for the sake of your continued progress to notice the discontinuity (through the use of video, mirrors, and a heightened tactile awareness) and to work to do something about it.

Get it?