

**Mine! Mine! Mine! This here is *my* asylum
And *I'm* running it**

If a cop stops you, how often do you argue “that law doesn’t apply to *me*”? Nor if your horse is pitching you through the air do you tell Sir Isaac that you choose to disregard his theory. Some on the fringe claim you actually *can* tell the IRS to shove it, but you get the idea. As Klaus used to say, “Rrrrules is rrrrules.”

As a dressage judge, I’d like to add, “even at schooling shows!”

There are minor exceptions. If a young horse seriously blows a canter depart, I can see why a trainer might want to make a second circle. It’ll cost her two points for the error, but the horse goes home better for it. On the other hand, there are limits:

While presiding over a Second Level class from C, I observed a rider making her Medium Trot diagonal rising rather than sitting as the test specifies. Whistling her to a stop, I reminded her of the discrepancy.

“Oh, sir,” she answered, “I’m not a good enough rider to sit to Medium Trot.”

“But it’s the requirement of the test,” I reminded her.

A long pause, then:

“So what would you like me to do?” she asked.

I could only look back at her, expressionless and with a slight tilt to my head as I enunciated slowly and distinctly, “So sit!”

It’s not that I’m unsympathetic to riders who haven’t mastered various skills. And playing around at home, I might well have such a rider rise to her Mediums. But gee whiz, when you enter a show and compete against other people who have designs on a primary colored ribbon, then you have to play by the mutually agreed upon rules. That’s only fair. In the old days when even Training Level required sitting trot, I could at least see a reason to bend them (although I never did). But now you have all of Intro, all of Training, and all of First Level —nine tests—that you can ride before sitting becomes mandatory.

Moving up in the levels is supposed to be something that you do when you and your horse are ready and can hope to fulfill the requirements. Promoting yourself when you’re tired of the old tests or “just because” really isn’t a good enough explanation!

Once a woman went even farther towards leaving me speechless. Again, it was at a schooling show. Between rides she came to me and asked if I would judge a test that she’d made up. Not a freestyle, just a test which she had written herself.

I looked it over and noticed, among other things, that there was no left lead canter—only canter to the right. I mentioned that omission to her and she responded that her horse didn’t do his left lead very well.

I sighed, thinking “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she has to ride in mine!” At that point there were 17 AHSA tests and 4 USDF Intro tests she could have chosen from. And they were created to produce supple, obedient, symmetrical horses. Writing a test that avoided confronting her difficulties and, as a result, artificially inflating the score beyond what her horse deserved, seemed to be missing the point.

As you probably have guessed, I politely declined the invitation and suggested she should choose from the ones already on the menu, secure in the knowledge that I use my powers only for Good.”

