

SECTION 1

YOUNG HORSES – TRAINING AND JUDGMENT

The link between training and judgment, when dealing with young horses, is essential, because one activity (judgment) can be carried out in the best way possible if we understand the fundamental principles of the other activity (training), and the latter can evolve correctly if it is carried out according to the standards of the “scale of training and judgment” that joins judges and trainers under the same classical principles of dressage.

Training young horses is an arduous task, but judging them is equally as difficult. This is true to the point that the FEI has decided to institute dedicated courses for international judges to certify them, after taking an exam to judge classes of young horses, as well as 5-star judges.

Apart from the “technical” methodologies demonstrated and discussed in those courses, one of the fundamental aspects of the work done there is the “DECONTRACTED HORSE,” highlighting the logical connection existing between the preliminary phase of the “training scale” (applicable to young horses) and the same requirement that is also required of a Grand Prix horse, for example

to perform a transition to extended walk immediately after a high collection figure (e.g. passage).

This explains why the extended walk is given a higher coefficient! It is held (properly) that the extended walk allows for assessing the quality of the training, observing, among other things, if the horse remains DECONTRACTED immediately after having executed a high collection figure with great physical effort.

The Grand Prix horse will be capable of such a “performance” only if, from the beginning, it has had the possibility to learn to decontract and has maintained this prerogative during the course of its training process.

The judges are called on to preserve the classic principles of dressage and thus have a great responsibility to reward those trainers (and their horses) who follow those principles, and to sanction without compromise those who completely ignore or however underestimate fundamental concepts of dressage such as “DECONTRACTION,” “THOROUGHNESS” and “HORSE IN BALANCE.”

That said, we should immediately stress that another fundamental aspect to consider in training (and judging) young horses is for the young horse to find its natural balance when it bears the weight of the saddle and rider, which it is not used to; therefore, helping the

horse to find its natural balance is one of the fundamental goals to be pursued in the preliminary phase of training. The additional weight of the rider, even for an animal with great natural balance, is a burden that the horse will have to gradually get used to. In examining the classes of young horses that are four years old, for example, it will be noted that they are not requested to perform particular figures such as circles with short diameters or sudden changes of direction or extended gaits. Rather they are asked to perform simple exercises, aimed at evaluating the quality of the horse's gaits, the physical and mental decontraction, and the practical application of the principles of "scale of training" for that training level. At these levels and this age, collection is to be introduced very gradually; note that the first attempts at collected walk (the hardest gait, and in a certain sense the most dangerous to introduce) are not foreseen in the "four year" classes, and when they are introduced, are done so only for a brief distance before performing the walk pirouette. In the 5 years old classes this is a great satisfaction for this writer, because following an observation made by me, the proposal to eliminate the requirement of the collection steps for a longer distance for 5 years old horses was accepted, considering that very often, in performing this figure prematurely, the gait was actually heavily damaged.

It is known that horses have survived over the centuries thanks to the innate instinct to flee, thanks to which, unlike many other animals that were stronger than horses but no longer exist, they continue to bring us enjoyment. Another aspect of the horse that is little considered, though, is the fact that over the centuries it has developed what we could call “chromosomes” originating from the ancient habit of being a companion for multiple human activities (transport, a work tool, but primarily a companion in battle), such that there is nothing that makes a horse more nervous than not understanding, or not being able to understand, the commands from its rider. It will be noted, as stated in jargon, that horses ultimately adapt to the way their rider sits, perhaps even adjusting to what could be called a low standard. All of this is understandable because the horse has in fact developed these chromosomes over the centuries and thus tends to seek to understand the requests from the rider as best as possible, to then put them into practice. One day, Mr. Theodorescu told me a story that demonstrates this aspect. A famous friend of his who was a jumping rider, Fritz Ligges (who rode a very famous jumping horse, Ramses), before a demanding jumping competition felt that his horse was very nervous, even trembling, but all he had to do was caress him before the bell rang and the horse would relax, and be ready to face demanding jumps with his rider. The interesting thing is that the

rider could immediately perceive this relaxation with his legs right after having caressed and encouraged him. This aspect is intimately linked to another aspect that has been explained elsewhere, that is, in a meeting of 5-star international judges where it was explained clearly that, for example, as long as the rest works properly, the tongue kept forward between the teeth is absolutely not a problem, because that position can be a result of the horse's concentration in seeking to satisfy the rider's requests in particularly demanding figures. All of this allows us to conclude that the rider must primarily seek to relax (decontract) the horse and make him understand that any misunderstandings or imperfect interpretations of the rider's requests are not a problem; then, if in very demanding figures that imply collection, the horse shows signs of concentration that absolutely do not affect its performance, this behavior may be linked to the particular disposition of certain horses, that may be particularly anxious to perform as best as possible while trying to fully understand the rider's requests. Friendly and encouraging behavior on the part of the rider will be of assistance in helping the horse overcome this anxiety.

In training a young horse, it is necessary to lay the foundation for this mutual understanding, and this will not be possible if one does not

seek to obtain the physical and mental decontraction of the horse, confirming day after day the horse's trust towards the rider.

One of the most important aspects, and perhaps the most important aspect of dressage, is that of training "happy athletes," i.e. horses eager to execute the figures requested by the rider without using force, and this will also help the horse remain in good health and develop its natural gaits, allowing it to find the proper balance under its rider's weight.

Only a sensitive rider with great experience can properly train a young horse, but in any event, the training should always take place under the supervision of an expert trainer who is able to interpret the individual physical and mental characteristics of the young horse.

SECTION 2

FROM THE PASTURE TO THE SADDLE

To break in and then train a colt is a much more complex activity than believed, but being called on to judge a class of young horses, as we have already said, is also not a simple task. Each horse is different from others, with its temperament, character, and way of moving with continuous changes of its physical and mental characteristics in the phase of muscular and mental growth. Thus it will be necessary the presence of an expert, talented rider, supervised by another expert trainer, who is able to recognize and judge the various stages of physical and mental development of the horse, to properly train a colt and avoid situations which, unfortunately, we see quite often, such as physical harm and behavioral disorders deriving from excessive effort made prematurely compared to what is allowed by the physical preparation of a colt that is still immature.

Very often, unfortunately, riders and trainers do not give particular attention to the importance of interpreting and understanding the mental and physical characteristics of the horses entrusted to them for training. In my view, this aspect, that is so often underestimated, is actually essential to properly train a young horse. Only those who invest time to study and seek to understand the nature of their horses

will be able to train them correctly, with technical methods that always involve kindness and sensitivity.

Horses are herd animals. The herd sees to their protection and their safety. In general, it is unlikely that a horse will like to remain alone, and thus a young horse should be introduced gradually, with great tact, to this situation that is new and not natural for him. Colts prefer being in groups, so this is a first aspect to take into consideration. Significant advantages can be derived from this innate herd instinct, such as leaving an older or more expert and calm horse nearby.

Horses have a clear hierarchical structure. The rules that are set in the herd help ensure their survival. Whoever has observed groups of colts grazing will also have seen true battles to establish the hierarchy in the herd. To defend themselves, horses use their hooves and teeth, and as we all know well, they can be surprisingly fast when doing so, but they are also very sensitive in their approach to other similar beings, demonstrating in many ways their dislike, aversion, or affection towards another individual in the herd. Horses tend to establish a hierarchical degree in the relationships between human beings and themselves. Only a calm and sensitive rider will be accepted by the horse as having a higher rank.

It is known that for horses flight is the principal path to survival. In fact, for herbivores instant flight is the best possible protection

against any threat of danger. However, horses have different levels of perception of danger. For example, insecurity can lead to flight, but a horse seized with panic can truly become dangerous. The tendency horses have to sense danger and run away can certainly disturb the rider if it happens suddenly, but there is no use in punishing the horse for this attitude, which we must remember, derives from its innate instinct for survival. A patient and calm process of “familiarization” should also entail introducing the horse to new situations, consolidating its internal security and trust towards its rider.

For many years, the horses trained in our stables have made use of trainers specialized in the method known as “PARELLI.”

This method is used to “desensitize horses with respect to outside events,” such as sounds, visual disturbances, getting in and out of the van, etc.

Horses are also active animals in their natural environment; in the steppe or prairies wild horses were almost always moving, and thus movement, light, open-air activity and contact with other horses are fundamental factors for their well-being. In the daily management of stables, as well as in actual training, it is important to ensure that horses are moved regularly, and this, in combination with the type of training (for example, allowing freedom of movement at times, even

in the paddock, or alternating horse rides in open air with the daily training program), will certainly produce beneficial effects in the progression of young horses' training.

Each horse is different from others in terms of character and temperament, aversions and preferences; their more or less benevolent disposition and more or less positive attitude can be sensed from many external signals, such as the movement of the ears, the expression of the eyes, and the movements of the tail. In general horses are not aggressive animals, although they can sometimes show some forms of aggression with their similars, especially among stallions, while problems with human beings are principally the result of inappropriate treatment. On this point, it is known, unfortunately, that horses are animals that tend not to easily forget their bad experiences!!!

Quality training can be recognized not only in the improvement of the natural gait despite the additional weight of the rider, but also from how their natural qualities, individuality, and personality are in any event maintained.

A good trainer will use all of the time and patience necessary to observe and interpret to their own benefit the habits and character traits of that specific horse, helping to earn its trust. A certain amount

of experience is however necessary to discern between fear and resistance, and be able to act accordingly.

Horses put in a position to voluntarily execute what is proposed to them in the daily training program will be, so to say, facilitated in developing a harmonious, lasting, and productive relationship with their rider. Thus patience and respect for the particular personality of each horse, frequent praise for exercises done well, calm and sensitivity, will be the foundations on which proper training is to be based. By doing this, the horse's desire to continue to learn the new exercises will be strengthened, avoiding in this stage the emergence of resistance and fear in the animal, that are then difficult to remove later. All of this does not mean that the horse does not need clear guidelines; it is important to react calmly and proportionately to an event that has created a certain situation that may be critical, which is not that different from the education a parent gives their child, i.e. a relationship that is undoubtedly among friends, but where the parent in any event remains the parent. If the horse's trust towards its rider is weakened, or even completely lost due to brutal or however unreasonable treatment, the potential work for correction and re-education will require months if not years (and sometimes not be successful) before the horse's trust is restored. Non-systematic training methods with requests that go beyond the horse's mental

and physical abilities (at that moment) that are obtained with force, will certainly lead to the emergence of various types of problems. **The study of a horse's psyche is of vital importance in training the horse. Harmony between human being and horse is essential for proper training and thus the horse's psycho-physical well-being must always come first when the instructor/rider has to decide the degree of difficulty of the exercises requested of the horse.**

SECTION 3

THE PRELIMINARY TRAINING OF A YOUNG HORSE

To train a young horse, it is advisable, as already stated, to involve a rider with great experience and clear knowledge of the way to gradually propose his aids, possessing an independent seat and a good use of the legs and hands. Ideally, that rider should not be too heavy, but most of all should be confident, not fearful, and have good patience. In this phase, it is also useful to use slightly shorter leather stirrups, and thus the rider should have a certain familiarity with riding in light seat. The trainer who supervises the physical-mental development of a young horse, to ensure proper training, must have both theoretical and practical knowledge and always ideally keep in mind the “scale of training and judgment” (see box below). Moreover, he (or she) should have sufficient knowledge of functional anatomy of a horse. A trainer with these characteristics will be able to resolve any difficult situations without resorting to the use of force or brutal methods.

For any horse (whether young or experienced, regardless of the discipline to be practiced), it is of vital importance to succeed in finding the proper balance under the rider’s weight. A horse that is not balanced will always move with tension and contracted muscles as it seeks to compensate for that deficiency; in this situation, true

decontraction can surely not be reached. Without balance, the horse's physical and mental well-being, and its health, will be at risk; in addition, the decontraction phase, that is necessary for the proper continuation of the training, will not be possible because no living being (not only a horse, but also humans) can be comfortable if they find themselves in a situation of imbalance.

The rider's ability to remain balanced, "taking hold" of the horse's center of gravity and being able to adapt to any temporary changes of the same, will be essential for proper training of the colt, because as can certainly be understood, the rider's weight initially could disturb the natural balance of the young horse.

In nature, the horse bears more weight on the front legs, and thus with the additional weight of the rider the horse will have to deal with a new situation of imbalance, and gradually become accustomed to it. It should be clearly underscored that the very first phase of training of a colt must primarily seek to recreate a situation of balance for both horse and rider. At the beginning, the horse will need to regain its balance with the rider's weight without force, thus preserving its natural freedom and pleasure of moving. Contracted muscles will not help for this purpose, and will not bring improvements to either its balance or its natural movements. Therefore, attempting to decontract the horse and induce it to relax is the key point in the

training of a young horse (and others as well!). In order to improve the physical and mental decontraction of a young horse, it is advisable to vary the daily work regardless of whether or not the horse will be used in a particular equestrian discipline. In fact, “specializing” a young horse too early could produce a sense of monotony in the animal, associated with muscular fatigue; thus a variegated training base will help improve the horse’s balance and decontraction, preserving its health.

The best age to start riding a colt is generally considered to be three years; whether it starts a bit earlier than its third birthday, or a bit later, will depend principally on its physical characteristics. It is believed that this is the best age because at around four, horses have developed much more strength, which could transform into negative exuberance. The initial approach with the horse must be based on gentle manners and a continuous search for the creation of a form of “friendly partnership.” It is generally thought to be positive to give the horse an additional break of three-four months in the pasture after the first months of riding work with the colt. This will help the joints, muscle and bone structures to become stronger, returning the horse to work the following autumn, with a physical and mental situation that will certainly be more favorable.

Before starting the proper training of a young horse coming from the pasture, it is a good thing to accustom it to the presence of a human being. If the colt comes from a stud farm that follows professional principles, that task will certainly have been successfully achieved by a trainer who has gotten the colt used to the presence of people, to being touched, to allowing its legs to be raised, and in general to trusting its human partner. When the colt comes to the stable, and before being broken in, it should be led around by hand, attended to, and become used to raising its legs to make all of these operations familiar in a calm and serene atmosphere. The transfer from the pasture to the stable is per se already a difficult event for a colt: it is important for it to be similar to that of a boy who is sent to a boarding school for the first time and realizes that he is surrounded by friends at that school, and that all things considered, life will certainly be different, but not more unpleasant than it was before.

It should be carefully considered that a young horse, in the full development phase and that until a short time before was grazing with its similars, cannot suddenly remain in a closed box twenty-three hours a day. Thus it is very important for the colt to have the possibility to move around, in walking machine, on the lunge, and in the pasture, remembering that lunge work should however begin

when the young horse is stably accustomed to the new place and the new people.

Lunge work is a fundamental importance to introduce the young horse to the saddle, get it used to the work, and learn the basic aids, also with the assistance of voice commands, and to develop its sense of obedience. If done well, lunge work will contribute to considerably improving decontraction and respect for the sequences in the various gaits. At the beginning, the horse will have to become accustomed to using the snaffle and maybe to wear a band to then replace it later with the saddle. Particular attention must be paid to the fact that the saddle, band and snaffle are to have shapes and dimensions that are comfortable for the horse. When a colt is introduced to work on the lunge, it is highly recommended to lead it in a circle that is marked by barriers or however by other types of boundaries.

Although it is not a rule that applies in general to all horses, lunge work generally begins with the trot, since in this gait many horses find it easier to decontract and extend the neckline, thus arching their back. Only when the horse's back is arched and active and the horse shows that it moves in balance, can the use of rubber reins or fixed reins be introduced, provided they are applied in a way that avoids pressure on the horse's mouth; the reins can be gradually shortened,

but in any event never to a length less than that of the horse's neckline. It is in fact of vital importance to ensure that the horse extends towards the bit, instead of shortening the neckline. It may be a new concept for some that the scale of training is just as valid in lunge work as well, and thus maintaining the proper sequence of the various gaits is extremely important also when a horse is led on the lunge.

The gaits expressed in their natural tempo favor the horse's movements in decontraction and balance.

It is very important for the horse to understand and learn the aids that the trainer proposes through the lunge work. So driving aids with the whip associated with the voice, and later restrictive aids of the lunge, always associated with a consequent use of the voice, will be of great assistance in continuing the training of a colt.

When the time comes to break in the horse, the lunge band will be replaced by a saddle, and for the first few days it will be better to remove the stirrups. After having experimented with a certain "acceptance" of the saddle on the colt's back, the stirrups can be put back on, but at least at the beginning they will have to be fastened in such a way as not to bother the horse while he gets used to this new situation, while later they can be left to hang freely.

The lunge work with the colt should last no more than half an hour, to ensure that the horse remains healthy above all, and that, in any event, it completes the work without being fatigued and remains calm. Naturally, the direction of the lunge work should vary, generally starting on the left side and then ending on the right.

The first attempt to ride the horse should generally take place under the guidance of an experienced trainer, who will control the horse on the lunge in an area that should preferably be marked off, and if possible be in a indoor riding manege.

In the case of anxious or very nervous horses, it can be useful the first time to simply lean on the saddle without actually mounting. At the beginning, the stirrups should be rather short, so that the rider is light and does not bring all of his (or her) weight onto the horse's back. After having succeeded in sitting in the saddle, the rider should stay still for a few moments and caress the horse so it gets accustomed to this new situation. In the context of the philosophy presented to this point, to which I refer as a trainer and judge, i.e. that the horse needs to be decontracted both mentally and physically, it is very advisable to continue to talk to and caress the horse.

The horse is to be gradually led in a rather wide circle, allowing the length of the lunge line to become longer and longer. If the horse

attempts to trot, the rider should absolutely not object. Still on the lunge, the horse should gradually learn to react calmly to the rider's weight (as stated, first walking and if possible also when trotting). This does not mean not allowing the horse to canter, but in this phase, this gait certainly does not help the colt in the process of adapting to the rider's weight.

After having repeated success riding a horse with the assistance of the trainer on the lunge, it will be possible to ride the horse freely in the indoor manege. It is very important to ride in straight lines, to proceed with a clear inclination forward and very light contact. The first sessions should not last very long; it is in fact preferable to conduct rather short training periods, dedicating the end of these sessions to mounting and dismounting multiple times. This will get the colt increasingly used to this operation, especially if it is involved and pleased with caresses, sugar, etc. When the rider begins to ride the colt without the assistance of the lunge, patience will be required to ensure that the horse learns to move and bear the rider's weight in the saddle in its natural "tempo" on long and possibly straight lines. If a more experienced horse is available, it could be of great assistance, because a young horse will tend to follow the older one.

The rider must favor the tendency from the horse to move forward, that is, to manage this tendency intelligently if the colt spontaneously

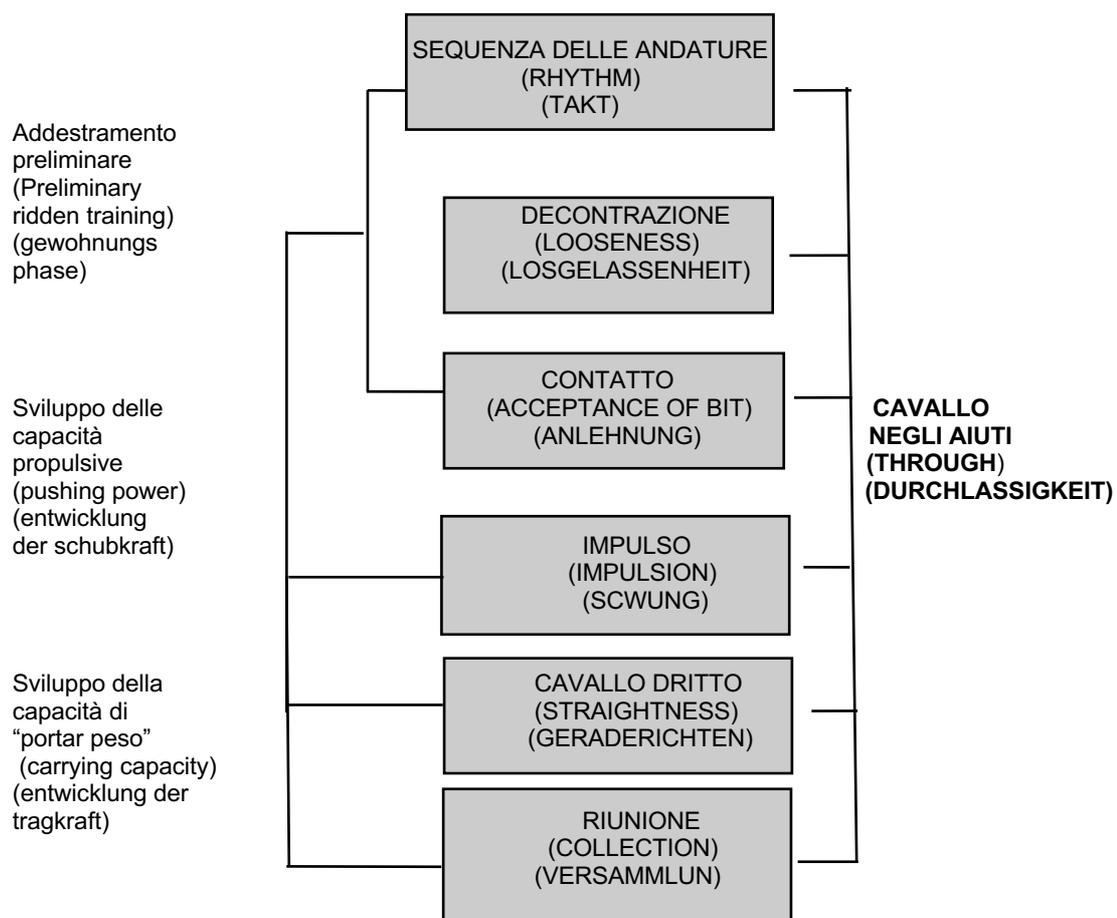
offers it, but in any case the rider must “feel” what the “right tempo” is for that specific horse in order to help it re-establish its balance. The rider must maintain very gentle contact with the horse’s mouth and in any case must avoid forcing the horse to “stay in hand.” This aspect is very often misinterpreted in everyday practice, and it should be clearly stated that forcing the horse into a more or less “formal” position will certainly lead to resistance such as “head shaking,” disturbances in the correct sequence of the gaits, a contracted back, “ears down,” and a general state of contraction of the muscles, mouth problems, etc. All of these signals must be observed during a class by a careful judge and adequately sanctioned to provide clear guidance concerning the inadequacy of the training method adopted. This phase of training should be primarily dedicated to riding the horse calmly, but with a clear forward tendency, carefully avoiding the heavy use of the hands. It should be clarified that riding forward absolutely does not mean hurling the horse into extended or hurried gaits. It is important to choose the “tempo” that is most suited to the specific horse. In fact, the essential point for a colt is being able to find its natural balance, and in general the best gait for that purpose is the trot. The canter will have to be accepted if the young horse offers it spontaneously, but in that case the rider should remain in a light position in order not to bring his (or her) weight down on the

horse's back. Long canter sessions should be avoided because the horse will certainly lack the necessary balance to maintain this gait for a long time, and as already repeated, the most important goal in this phase is for the horse to re-establish its natural balance.

Both the rider and the trainer should have clear knowledge of the theories and practical implications of the various phases of the scale of training and judgment. Therefore, it is important to understand their meaning well and be able to apply those principles in practice. Likewise, this is important also for those who are called on to judge classes of young horses. In fact, the so-called "preliminary" phase of the "scale of training" (also called familiarization), is of fundamental importance in the first period of training. The preliminary phase regards the correct sequence of the gaits, decontraction, and contact. The first goal is to consolidate the sequence of gaits through an ideal tempo for each gait, to be set as a function of the characteristics of each single horse. Riding forward too fast creates a hurried movement of the hind legs, that disturbs the sequence of the gait, for example the trot. It should in fact be clarified that riding forward does not mean riding faster, but implies the activation of the hind legs, that will push the horse's weight vigorously forward. The judges must verify that the movements at all three gaits are regular, recalling that this is a fundamental goal in this phase. Horses that

show disturbances or irregularities in the sequence of their gaits have very often been ridden too hard with the hands or with insufficient driving aids, or the restoration of the horse's natural balance was not favored due to excessive speed, or to the contrary, because they weren't ridden forward enough.

SCALE OF TRAINING



SECTION 4

DECONTRACTION

In this phase of training, decontraction is the main goal (in reality, it is important never to lose sight of this goal, even in the subsequent phases of training). The degree of decontraction reached in relation to the age and time of training of the colt must be checked regularly with the aim of improving and polishing it day after day.

Decontraction means using the muscles without tension, contracting or relaxing when requested or necessary, and thus decontraction can be achieved only if the use of force, or in any event brutal methods in the daily training of the colt, are avoided.

The horse must be happy and physically decontracted in order to reach physical and mental decontraction; this in fact represents one of the fundamental points to determine for those who are to judge high-level classes. As already mentioned, the extended walk always entails a higher coefficient, (the horse is often asked to shift to that walk after having performed a high collection figure) because the decontracted horse mirrors the quality of the training provided to it.

Careful treatment in the stable, implemented with regular behavior and sensitivity, as well as the opportunity to move around during the day, will certainly be of assistance in reaching this goal. A physically and psychologically decontracted horse moves with its back

oscillating at a natural tempo in all gaits, with a clear tendency to go forward, but without hurrying.

Decontraction and stretching exercises serve to warm up the horse's muscles, tendons, and joints, favoring the oscillation of the back. The hind legs push the horse forward, and the horse will seek out the rider's hand with light and trusting contact. Decontraction can be verified by the horse's desire to lengthen the neckline and seek the bit low and forward (an exercise which is often required in classes for young horses). This way the reins slide through the rider's fingers (at the international level, this exercise is considered to be of fundamental importance in training young horses and is included in all classes for young horses). Sensitive and light contact will inspire security in the horse, favoring the process of re-establishing its balance with the rider in the saddle. The horse will move forward in the sequence of the chosen gait, with the back oscillating, in a calm and balanced manner. In walk it is always advisable to keep the young horse with long reins and shorten the reins only a moment before beginning the transition to trot, for example, while in trot and canter the horse is sent forward towards a hand that must be gentle and fairly "passive."

During this process of familiarization of the colt, the rider must maintain light contact with the mouth and not force it into an "only

formally” correct position of the neckline through the use of the hands. Light and sensitive contact will enormously help a young horse to find its balance, to proceed with the correct sequence of the chosen gait, and to decontract. Lunge work conducted systematically can also provide a contribution, because when done well, the horse’s muscles will be “trained” correctly. Thanks to the driving aids and a sensitive hand, the horse will learn to move (without interpreting this action with excessive formalism), in an ideal position where, in visual terms, the head and nose should be vertically aligned.

Initially, a young horse will seek contact in a position where the neckline is slightly lowered. This is a position that (thanks to the implicit stretching it entails) certainly favors more easily achieving decontraction of the muscles in the neck and the back. Trainers, but above all judges, must certainly be very careful not to favor forms of bad training where the horse’s neckline is limited and shortened through the use of the hands. A shortened neckline creates tension and does not allow for easily seeking the horse’s balance, it prevents movement of the hind legs forward and the oscillation of the back, which will certainly create technical problems for young horses (balance, difficulty bearing weight, irritability, etc.). Occasionally, it is possible that a young horse will be above the hand or below the vertical, but it is important to be sure that it is never behind the hand

(a much more serious problem!). Trust in the rider's hand can be improved and verified through temporarily giving away the contact on the reins. In training young horses, it is important to take into consideration their physical condition, and the potential lack of muscles and strength, thus avoiding going too far in the work. If these criteria are not observed, serious mental and physical damage could be done to the colt.

In the initial phase of training, in general, it is not advisable to execute predetermined figures, but rather elementary exercises such as changing in the diagonal, or the half diagonal, and executing large circles and changes of direction. This should be done with a very large diameter, while avoiding tight circles and sudden changes of direction in this phase, so as not to damage the horse's muscle, tendon, and joint structure.

PARAGRAPH 5

PROGRESSION OF WORK AND CONCLUSIONS

After five to six months of work on a mounted horse, certain fundamental prerogatives of preliminary training should be consolidated, such as the proper sequence of gaits, riding forward, and constant and light contact, but most of all it is important to seek the physical and mental decontraction of the young horse. Gradually and systematically, the initial requests can be increased; how far one can go will depend on the rider's ability, and it must be said, also on the intrinsic abilities of the horse. Moreover, the situations that arise day after day will play an important role in setting the training program, because while for older and more experienced horses it will be necessary to confirm what they have learned and thus keep them in shape, for young horses it will often be necessary to manage an alternation between good results and at some times less positive ones at others, and thus performance that one day may be satisfying while the next day it could be less so, perhaps with some demonstration of youthful exuberance, alternated with different levels of fatigue or different levels of need for movement. All of this is also unquestionably influenced by the environment in which the training takes place.

With the continuation of the basic training, the rider should gradually get the horse used to the purposes of the various aids. The rider may always replace his (or her) basic aids with increasingly refined commands.

As already said, in nature a horse bears most of its weight on the fore legs, and when the weight of the rider is added this situation is aggravated. To maintain the health conditions and preserve the horse's natural balance, it must be encouraged to increasingly bring its hind legs under the center of gravity. That procedure must be gradually presented to a young horse, with great caution and sensitivity. The exercises that facilitate reaching this goal are transitions between the different gaits and in the context of the same gait. The principal transition is the one from trot to canter and from canter to trot. The judges, when they must judge classes of four-year old horses, for example, will have to pay great attention to the accuracy of execution of these transitions.

Later, the transitions from trot to walk will help considerably to engage the hind legs, and this will be possible if the horse's neckline has not been shortened due to the excessive use of the rider's hands. In addition, in riding the transitions, especially from the standpoint of the judges, it will be important to verify that the decontraction and oscillation of the back are always present.

Ultimately, through the execution of correct transitions by a sensitive rider, the proper sequence of the gaits, decontraction, and contact with the horse will certainly be improved. The period that may be used to introduce the seated trot will depend on when the horse has learned to use its back. If properly ridden forward, it will willingly seek the contact offered by the rider's hands, through its own mouth. At the beginning it will be sufficient to sit for only a few meters, and if the rider has the sensation that the horse blocks its back following that situation, it will be necessary to immediately return to light trot to restore the oscillation and use of the back. With the progression of the training, circles and changes of direction are to be executed with a smaller diameter, perfecting them. In fact, by riding rather wide circles the horse is helped to decontract, since those figures, executed in a constant tempo and with clear forward movement, are very useful for this purpose. A correct bending, and, for example, a correct execution of a circle, will be possible only if the contact is constant and light.

This is an observation on which judges should reflect deeply when they have to judge classes of young horses. In particular, a horse with a shortened neckline will not bend at the first vertebra, but at the third; this can be perceived visually and should as a consequence be sanctioned. Once the horse has accepted the rider's aids, some

more demanding lateral movements can be introduced (exercises such as reducing and expanding the circle in a spiral, leg yielding, and so on). Good basic training of a young horse tends to produce a horse that will respect and execute the rider's aids with good willingness, remaining physically and mentally decontracted for the entire time of its performance.

Ultimately, as the FEI indicates, what we would like to see in the competition arena is a "HAPPY ATHLETE"!!!

SECTION 6

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN, ENERGY, ENGAGEMENT OF HIND LEGS, AND COLLECTION.

“PUSHING POWER” AND “CARRYING CAPACITY”

First of all, I would like to cite a famous saying by G. Steinbrecht: “Ride your horse forward and straight,” but riding a horse forward requires some reflection in the context of dressage.

In fact, in a canter track or a country path, or in a timed obstacle jumping competition, it is easier to perceive the essence of the forward movement of the horse, but in dressage as well it is important to keep in mind that this aspect is just as fundamental.

The basis of any equestrian discipline is indeed the progression of forward movement, and this should never be forgotten in both training and judging a dressage horse. Dressage is not static at all, although we often see riders to attempt to keep their horses in a more or less “formal” pose with an excessive use of the hands or through the utilization of severe bits, thus contributing to inhibiting the horse’s innate desire to move forward.

The dressage impulsion (*schwung* in German) is principally generated by the energy created by the rider and describes the horse’s movement similar to a bow that becomes taught in order to launch an arrow forward. This implies the oscillation of the horse’s back and an evident elasticity of its movement, that will tend to be lost when the horse is hurried.

Therefore, the energy produced by the hind legs is the principal source of the horse’s driving capacity, that should ideally (one day) become the basis for the “capacity to bear weight” and not remain confined to the initial “thrust forward” of the hind legs (that is however a necessary premise for a young horse!). Therefore the concept of dressage impulsion (*schwung*) implies the ability of the hind legs to push the horse forward,

transmitting this energy through the back. The correct expression of this capacity implies active hind legs, engaged under the mass and the release of driving energy forward that propagates through the back, the withers, the neckline, the poll, and the mouth, to then return into the rider's hands. Following all of the elements of the scale of training will one day lead to reaching the "ideal" collection, that is the top of the pyramid of the scale of training itself.

Collection, however, assumes the transformation in time of the horse's driving capacity into a capacity to "bear weight" through specific exercises in the horse's training in order to obtain a correct "bending of the quarters and a greater engagement of the hind legs under the rider's weight." The visible result of all of this will be a "uphill tendency" that is, a lowering of the hind legs that will favor a lightness of the forehand of the horse, that will favor the execution of all of the collected figures in the same manner as the extended movements, characterized by great expressiveness and a clear to "uphill tendency" (i.e., produced by the bending of the haunches).

Sometimes we see young horses with fantastic gaits and a magnificent dressage impulsion, and also a good engagement of the hind legs, which is certainly an excellent starting point to one day be transformed into the capacity to bear weight, but that transformation is not always easy, sometimes due to improper training and sometimes because the horse itself is not able to achieve that result due to intervened physical problems or character deficiencies.

From what we have presented above, it follows that there can be dressage impulsion without collection, but never collection without impulsion (*schwung*).

SECTION 7

LONG AND DEEP

This work technique is included among the methods relating to one of the fundamental goals of the scale of training and judgment, the physical and mental decontraction of the horse. In dressage practice, it is unfortunately a source of considerable misunderstanding, both in relation to its utility and as concerns its practical implementation.

A young horse is normally introduced to this type of work on the lunge, while when mounted, it will be necessary for the horse to already have a certain familiarity with the bit, and thus good contact. Normally, a young horse is introduced to “long and deep” work at the end of the lesson, when the signs of youthful exuberance tend to disappear; this happens by inviting the horse to follow the hand low and forward, with a tendency to softly follow the rider’s hand.

Unfortunately, this technique, that can be defined as stretching, and thus among the exercises for decontraction of the horse, is the source of countless misunderstandings in the everyday practice of horse-riding. To this we must add that many trainers do not use and do not believe in the usefulness of this work, since they believe that for many horses (and with inexperienced riders) such work implies the disadvantage of putting them on the shoulders.

This aversion in any event derives not so much from the recognition that this system is not needed for the development of the horse’s muscle system (this is indeed true, and will be examined later), but due to the concrete risk that when practiced by inexperienced riders, with the negative variants presented below, this technique can end up producing more negative than positive effects. In my view, if performed correctly, this work is actually essential to favor the stretching

of the horse's muscles, ligaments, and tendons, and above all to favor the use of the horse's back.

In observing the evolution of many sports and artistic activities, such as ballet, for example, we see that especially in the past, what was most sought after was the development of physical power, forging athletes with imposing muscles, but that physical and muscular development often took place without taking into account the importance of favoring and maintaining the flexibility of the tendons, ligaments, and the muscle mass itself.

A modern vision of this aspect has led many trainers in various disciplines to consider the importance of stretching exercises in general, with the result that these stretching techniques have now become common in many sports, and in the case of horses, in dressage. These techniques belong to the phase of decontraction, that phase of work normally defined as the "warm up" of the horse. The observation that the ideal arching of the back takes place with the complementary contraction of the abdominal muscles, that will be activated to the highest level of perfection when the horse is extremely collected is undoubtedly correct. In my view, this is the crux of the question: the aim of this technique is not to develop the horse's muscle system, because it is entirely evident, first of all, that a young horse is not yet able to accept a high degree of collection, and that older and more experienced horses, like all athletes, require a preliminary warm up phase before performing exercises with significant physical effort. Rather, it should be stressed that so-called "long and deep" work is actually necessary at the beginning of the work session for the preliminary preparation (warm up and stretching) of the horse's joints, tendons, and muscles, and in particular those of the horse's back, but it can never be used as a substitute for collection work for the purpose of its muscular development, that

always follows the initial decontraction work. In fact, the muscles will benefit from the preparatory stretching work, before beginning the contraction exercises involved in collection. It is therefore evident that the exercises with the horse in a “long and deep” approach will be very useful to preliminarily prepare the horse’s muscles for the next phase of muscular contraction, that is required in collection exercises.

In performing the “long and deep” work, there are essentially two lines of thought. Both are based on the assumption that there is an activity of the hind legs that causes the horse’s movement from behind to forward. In fact, thanks to the thrust forward, and under the mass of the hind legs, the horse’s back will rise (observe a dressage whip: by pushing the handle with one hand towards the other hand that acts as a soft barrier for the tip, we see that the central part rises, as the horse’s back does).

The difference between the two schools of thought is essentially in the position of the horse’s head and the neckline. In one school of thought, but it sufficient for the horse to bring its head down with the neckline extended. The basic request is thus for the neckline to be lower than the withers, considering that when the neckline lowers, the part of the back behind the fulcrum of the arch constituted by the withers rises. My opinion on this method is that it entails a considerable disadvantage, consisting of the fact that with this system, the horse is able to lengthen the neckline without actually “stretching” the peak of the neck. So if we look carefully, the horse extends the neckline and can keep it low, but by doing so, it actually ends up favoring the development of the antagonist muscles of the neckline itself.

With the second school of thought, the horse has no need to stay so low with the neckline (but it certainly can stay that way); however, the horse is asked to

bend a bit more, and thus to be “rounder”. This means that the horse’s nose must tend towards the inside with the result that for a short period, the horse’s head could be slightly behind the vertical.

Normally, I invite my students to understand the different perception of the effects inherent in these two techniques, having them sit in a chair in front of a table or another chair and inviting them to extend their back and rest their head on the edge of the table; once having them touch the edge of the table with their chin, to feel which muscles are stretched and which are blocked, while immediately after I have them repeat the same experience by touching the edge of the table with the middle of their poll so they can feel how not only the whole back, but the upper muscles of the neck as well, are stretched. In my view, when the horse is asked to work following this second system, in this position the neckline ensures the stretching also of the ligament system of the upper part of the neckline until the poll. In fact, when the horse is slightly bent at the poll, this leverage action adds a more beneficial effect to the relevant ligament system. I would like to highlight the importance of these statements, that is, of “slightly “bent;” the most important thing is in fact for the horse to extend and maintain the shape of an arc, as it is this position that allows the upper part of the neckline to extend from the withers and allows the back to rise behind the withers itself.

Another system that I use in order to have the rider feel the effect of raising the back consists of placing myself in front of the horse and interacting with him playfully (for example using sugar or carrots), taking his ears and playing with him to get him to bring his head down and thus extend the neckline, and simultaneously asking the rider if he feels the back rise each time the horse

lowers the neckline and head, with a slight bending of the poll (“rounded” horse).

With this system, we can demonstrate to the rider that the horse’s back and neckline are connected through the withers.

Sometimes, for short periods of time, the horse could be slightly behind the vertical. This is not a big problem provided that the hind legs are active and engaged under the mass, and through appropriate exercises are asked to gradually bear weight, and thus ultimately to collect. Thanks to those actions, the horse’s front will rise with the withers that will tend to rise as well and the neckline will be arched, assuming the correct position that we would ideally like to see in the competition arena, with the poll the highest point and the nose slightly ahead of the vertical.

I will never tire of repeating that “long and deep” work must be conducted with the lightest possible use of the reins, for two reasons. The first is that with a light use of the reins the horse cannot seek support from the rider’s hands. (I will continue to repeat forever the concept that it takes two to “pull”). This will contribute to developing elastic gaits and will be essential to ensure that the horse learns to carry itself independently even in this position.

In my view, this is the key to counter act the principal criticism of that work, that is, that horses end up transferring weight on to their shoulders.

In fact, although the balance is shifted in the opposite direction compared to collection work, the horse will not weigh on the hand, if ridden this way.

With tact, experience, and progression, the horse will benefit psychologically and develop physically, but above all, it will become responsible for its balance completely independent of the rider’s hands in all of the gaits.

One of my favorite concepts, in fact, that I will never tire of repeating, is the following: “it must be the horse that carries itself and the rider, and not the rider that carries the horse.”

In this way, the horse will learn to carry itself independently and at the same time will develop respect and confidence towards the rider.

This type of work, if carried out preliminarily and practised at intervals with collection work, will help the horse's back to become stronger and more elastic.

The second reason to ride with extremely light reins is that the rider must not force the horse into a situation of excessive bending, as takes place for example with the use of draw reins; that would end up causing physical problems and would certainly lead to the opposite effect than the one sought; in the best case, the horse will in fact become stiff.

Unfortunately, the practical execution of that work is often interpreted incorrectly. I have indeed observed, on various occasions, that this type of work receives a variant such that the resulting position can be considered neither long nor round, neither forward nor low. Indeed, the horse comes behind the vertical with the necklines shortened. It must be noted that only an extended neckline can keep its connection with the horse's entire body, which will become taught like a bow, not absorbing the aids of the reins only in the neck, as instead happens with the head behind the vertical and the neckline shortened. That counterproductive effect is then scaled down exponentially through the use of the draw reins!

I have on many occasions taken pains to explain that no logical explanation exists for this type of work. Horses trained with this system, when asked to use their hind legs in high collection exercises, such as piaffè, are unable to respond to that request, that will be difficult for them. This is not a simple coincidence:

the horse will tighten up its back, and what apparently seems to have been obtained with the use of draw reins (i.e. the “formally” rounded horse), in reality turns out to be like a padlock that closes the lumbo-sacral area and does not allow the rider, through the pelvic bones, to feel the raising of the back.

I have unsuccessfully sought plausible explanations for why some trainers continue to use that system. Sometimes I realized that those riders, perhaps having a certain fear of riding exuberant horses, keep the horse’s head and neckline retracted through draw reins for a long period of time, in order to obtain absolute submission. Being a dressage judge as well, I realize that absolute submission could perhaps allow for avoiding serious errors in competition or controlling disobedient horses, but the result of this type of work resembles Greco-Roman fight or wrestling, where one of the parties must submit and give in to the winner, rather than classical dressage, that finds its best expression in the “HAPPY ATHLETE.”

The result is always very modest from a quality standpoint, and should be properly sanctioned by expert judges with mediocre evaluations and scores.

What has been stated above does not imply that all horses behave like trainees and never require decisive correction. On this point, I often refer to the relationship that should exist between father and son, one of complete friendship, but where the father is always the parent responsible for the proper education of his son.

In any event, basing one’s training system on the physical domination of the horse, achieved through draw reins or other coercive means, will not allow for the development of harmonic and elastic muscles, with the result – at times – of producing performance that (maybe!) lacks formal errors, but certainly lacks any expression. The famous German rider H. Schmidt recently told me: a champion

will never emerge from this type of work, and draw reins have never produced a champion.

On this point, my other great teachers used to say: “draw reins can only be used by an artist, but an artist has no need for draw reins” (H. Chammartin), or “draw reins are like a razor in the hands of a monkey” (G. Theodorescu), or “the short-cut on the road to hell” (Dr. R. Klimke).

The more riders keep the horse’s head retracted and low, the more they weaken the muscles at the point of the neckline, thus thinking that they are making their horses more manageable.

Any of us who have taken jumping lessons, even from a trainer who was not particularly famous, will have noticed that the he had objected considerably if at the moment of the jump the rider remained behind the horse’s movement, pulling on the reins, while the horse tried to basculate to use its rounded back in the arched position during the jump.

Well, this is exactly what these so-called dressage trainers teach every day, that is, to pull on the reins and thus block the horses attempt to use its back; thus shortening the horse’s neckline towards the chest.

A careful observer will note that the same type of results will be evident in dressage as well, but the negative effects that result are completely ignored by many riders, or perhaps those riders are simply unable to observe them: rigid neckline, lowered back, but above all, it will be evident because the rider will not understand that true collection comes from the horse’s possibility to engage under the mass with its hind legs, and this can only take place through a complete extension of the horse’s upper line.

Thus, to conclude the “long and deep” work, it is primarily an exercise of stretching, that implies long and slow movements by the horse, which will favor

confidence and trust in its rider and decontraction of the horse. That work must always be accompanied by a clear forward movement of the hind legs, but as noted above, with a use of the reins that does not force the neckline to be shortened, bringing the horse's head towards its chest. If executed well, that work constitutes a magnificent physical and mental counterbalance to the demanding work of collection. The preliminary stretching will thus serve to preserve flexibility and elasticity of the ligaments, muscles, tendons, and back.

It should be observed that every horse has different characteristics and requires a different degree of lowering the neckline. Among the many horses that I have trained with my daughter Valentina, this work has never been done in a uniform way for all of the horses. For example, for a horse that over time has developed enviable muscles and a really strong back, we practice this work principally in walk, followed by work in trot with the "rounded" horse, but without excessive lowering of the neckline. Sometimes, a complication could appear, for example with horses that tend to shift their weight to the front legs; in that case, a variant will be needed, for example conducting this work in walk, while for other horses (in general hot-blooded ones) the same work will be more effective if done in canter (with long and slow strides).

In conclusion, we can say that "long and deep" work, if implemented properly, is a formidable means of preserving the flexibility and elasticity of the horse's tendons, back, muscles, and ligaments, and will be of great assistance in the phase of physical and mental decontraction of the horse, thus favoring its attention and trust towards the rider.

SECTION 8

USING OF THE RANGE OF MARKS

A good dressage judge, among other qualities, must also have a clear vision of what each mark given really means, and thus must be able to coherently and correctly associate each mark with a corresponding judgment (such as sufficient, or bad). The scale of marks available, from zero to ten (with the possibility of “half marks,” i.e. 6.5, 8.5, and so on), is to be used in a uniform and coherent manner; which implies, among other things, that the judge should not change opinion from one competition to another, or from one rider to another.

0 - NOT PERFORMED

I don't remember having ever given a zero, but I have been present at a class in which a horse continued to perform the passage without any piaffé tempo at the required point, probably because the rider had realized that the horse was about to resist violently. I must specify, though, that this is a very rare event, and I remember well that even among the colleagues who had judged this class some had given a one and others a zero. Among the few examples where zero could be an appropriate mark, we can consider the possibility of a horse trotting or “jogging” during the entire walk movement, but remembering that if even a minimum portion of the required movement is present the mark cannot be zero. For example, if the horse has trotted during a canter change flying there is still a bit of canter to which to give a mark.

1 - VERY BAD

This is an appropriate mark in the presence of very strong resistance. For example, if a horse stops, goes backward, or rises up on his hind legs.

2 - BAD

In this case as well, we see some strong resistance by the horse, or much of the exercise has not been performed (for example, in walk the horse shows that gait for a short distance and then it begins to piaffé or short-trot, etc.).

3 - FAIRLY BAD

This mark should be given when there is resistance combined with a lack of quality, understood as failing to follow the elements of the training scale, and when other errors are present. In the total absence of quality, combined with errors or in the event that the horse resists, it is also possible to give a two. It is completely not correct to give a three in extended walk with the words “more ground cover” because if the sequence of the walk is however clear, the mark to be given should certainly be higher.

4 - INSUFFICIENT

The most important thing when a four is given is for the judge to think that the movement was performed in an insufficient manner with respect to the technical expectations required. For example, if a horse loses regularity in all of the trot movements due to rigidity or evident resistance, then a four is an appropriate mark, and a three may be even be appropriate if the resistance is strong.

Serious errors such as changing behind during the execution of a pirouette in canter or breaking canter during an extended trot, or losing the canter during a figure at this gait, as well as a horse that short-trots for much of the movement in walk, or falls in trot during a simple change of canter, are practical examples of when a four or even a three are appropriate marks (if there is a lack of quality or indication of resistance). I observed a judge, who was competent and experienced, give a four in a certain circumstance because right before the halt the horse had executed a “one tempi” change. This is not correct because the principal figure in fact consists of the halt correctly done in combination with the quality of the canter (good!) and thus that

involuntary change indicated a temporary loss of balance or slight misunderstanding between the horse and rider, that can be sanctioned with a point or a point and a half less in the mark otherwise earned (for example, a seven and a half would become a six).

5 - SUFFICIENT

If the horse has in any event performed the required movement, a five can be given (indicating "sufficient" in dressage), even if the movement is still somehow "restricted" (for example with legs that do not come off from the ground, or the absence of decontraction or impulsion), provided that in each case there is a certain regularity in the execution and that the design or figure are in any event accurate. The most important thing to observe is that the judge should explain in the notes why this movement is not satisfactory or good.

Situations can arise, however, in which there is good quality understood as adhering to the training scale and expressive gaits, but with an error (for example, changes of canter in series with a poorly executed change). In that case five could be the appropriate mark, since by deducting one or two points from what would otherwise have been deserved brings the mark to five, in the hypothetical case of deserving a mark of seven without the error.

6 - SATISFACTORY

Six is given when the movement is essentially correct, but executed without great quality (for example, not sufficiently decontracted, maybe with more engagement of the hind legs or more balance, or if the contact is not constant). A six is also attributed to a movement executed with great quality, but in the presence of a small error in execution or inaccuracy (for example, a pirouette in walk with a good quality of collected walk or a pirouette in canter with an excellent gait, but both that may be too big). Even when the horse is not straight, six is often the appropriate mark (an

example is an extended canter with the horse crooked), provided that the quality is good.

7 - FAIRLY GOOD

In general, there is nothing really “serious” to complain about here! There is generally a need for more impulsion, or more decontraction, or more expression, or more cadence, or the movement is not executed “uphill”. The basic qualities are however clear and there is a certain harmony and ease in the movement executed.

8 - GOOD

When an eight is given, there certainly must not be any basic problems. The movement has been executed correctly (for example in the case of an extended trot that deserved a nine, but that becomes an eight because the transition was not of the same quality as the extended trot). Often one part of the movement executed makes a nine become an eight (like the transition at the end of an extended canter or at the end of the extended trot). Yet at times an eight is given instead of a nine because a bit more brilliance is expected (for example, at elementary levels, a twenty-meter trot with a horse that is balanced and very regular, but that could show greater impulsion and elasticity).

9 - VERY GOOD

Here we are already in the “explosive” zone, with most of the movement executed in an excellent manner (maximum adherence to the elements of the training scale and great quality of the gaits).

10 - EXCELLENT

To give a ten, we need to imagine we are in the presence of an execution that ideally could not be any better. In any event, a ten must be a very special event, but if it were

given often it would lose its meaning. Personally, I have given a ten, on occasions that I remember perfectly.

It is well-known that some time ago, the FEI very appropriately introduced the use of half marks, that certainly allow for greater accuracy in judgment. Think of the figures with coefficients, for example, with a mark of 6.5: if there were no half mark, a 6 would be too penalizing and a 7 too generous. It is important for me to stress that the use of half marks is not recommended for marks under 5!

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

One of the fundamental requirements to be a good judge is to be as impartial and clear as possible. In this sense, if a movement is very good or excellent, the judge must have the courage to give an eight or a nine, and use the same courage to give a three or a four to a movement that deserves that mark, maybe during the course of the same class.

Indeed, when “quality” is present, the judge needs to be prepared to start from ten or nine, and thus come down as a function of the problems that are noticed during the execution of the figures.

ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS ON FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS

- 1 - **Jury scribes.** Do not allow a technical debate to begin on what has been judged. It is a good idea to fix control points during the test (for example, the first control in the extended walk) having the secretary say “we are at point nine, or ten” and even a second time during the class (perhaps coinciding with starting in canter).
- 2 - **Kür with music.** Artistic marks refer to the choreography and the choice and interpretation of the music. When this mark is given (relating to the music), the presentation of the test as a whole must be also taken into consideration.

The degree of difficulty and the first two marks on the right side of the Kür evaluation sheets actually refer to the technical assessment of the figures, and thus there should always be a relationship between them. Therefore, if the first two marks from the right side of the “kür class sheet” are not satisfactory, the degree of difficulty will not be able to receive a mark of satisfactory or higher.

3 - **Young horses.** When judging classes of young horses, pay attention, among other things, to the need for the two-handed work to also be done properly; always give positive comments to the riders and indicate what to improve, rather than stressing the negative part of the test. If a part of the presentation is omitted (for example, the leg yielding are not performed during a class), the “ridability” mark will suffer negatively, because whether by mistake or a premeditated choice, one of the fundamental exercises needed for that evaluation is not shown.

4 - **Tongue.** When the horse holds its tongue slight forward and low, absolutely ignore that position. If the tongue is pulled back, at least one point less for each figure, while if the horse’s tongue passes above the bit or the tongue shows on one side, take away at least two points, and the maximum mark given should be 5. Hyperactive mouth and lips: absolutely no problem sign of high concentration!

If the horse grinds its teeth, and there are no other signs of tension, that does not matter, because like the tongue held forward and low, it is very often a sign of concentration in the horse. In these cases, the general impression should be evaluated, that is, if the horse’s hind legs are engaged, the regularity of the gaits, if the horse is straight, etc.

5 - **Technical standards of reference.** The FEI rules are the technical source of reference. Avoid subjective evaluations (e.g. “in my view,” “I saw it this way,” etc.). The goals of dressage are well-defined in the FEI rules, as are the elements of the

training scale. Each movement must be evaluated based on the adherence to the points of the training scale and the specific standards of reference for the relevant figure.

- 6 - **Quality.** When we speak of quality there are often misunderstandings. Quality means above all adhering to the technical standards required, principally the training scale and judgment, and naturally, the quality of the gaits; but in this order.
- a. **Dressage cadence.** Remember that the ingredients of the dressage cadence are regularity, impulsion, and balance (collection). A young horse can show magnificent natural impulsion, but not dressage cadence since it is surely not yet mature enough to show the collection required. At advanced levels of dressage, if the horse does not show cadence, the maximum mark will be seven, provided there are no other problems to take into account.
- b. **Uphill.** When we speak of “uphill” we must consider the degree of bending and lowering of the hips that allows that horse to bear weight, and not, as many believe, a rising of the neckline often obtained with action by the hands. If a horse does not show uphill tendency (we repeat, for further clarity: bending of the hips that entails lightening and forward movement of the front part of the forehead of the horse, and thus visually of the withers), the maximum mark will be seven.

GENERAL NOTE: A judge’s main goal is to preserve classical principles and indicate the proper path to continue the horse’s training, and this implies, among other things, always maintaining a constructive and correct attitude towards the riders and not placing one’s own “personal” preferences ahead of an objective evaluation of the classes, and especially when one’s own judgment differs from that of colleagues, attempting to go over together (possibly with the assistance of video or the evaluation sheets) the points where those differences appeared, in order to reach a uniform judgment in similar situations in the future.