

ANNUAL BAROQUE ISSUE

Dressage

T O D A Y

August 2009

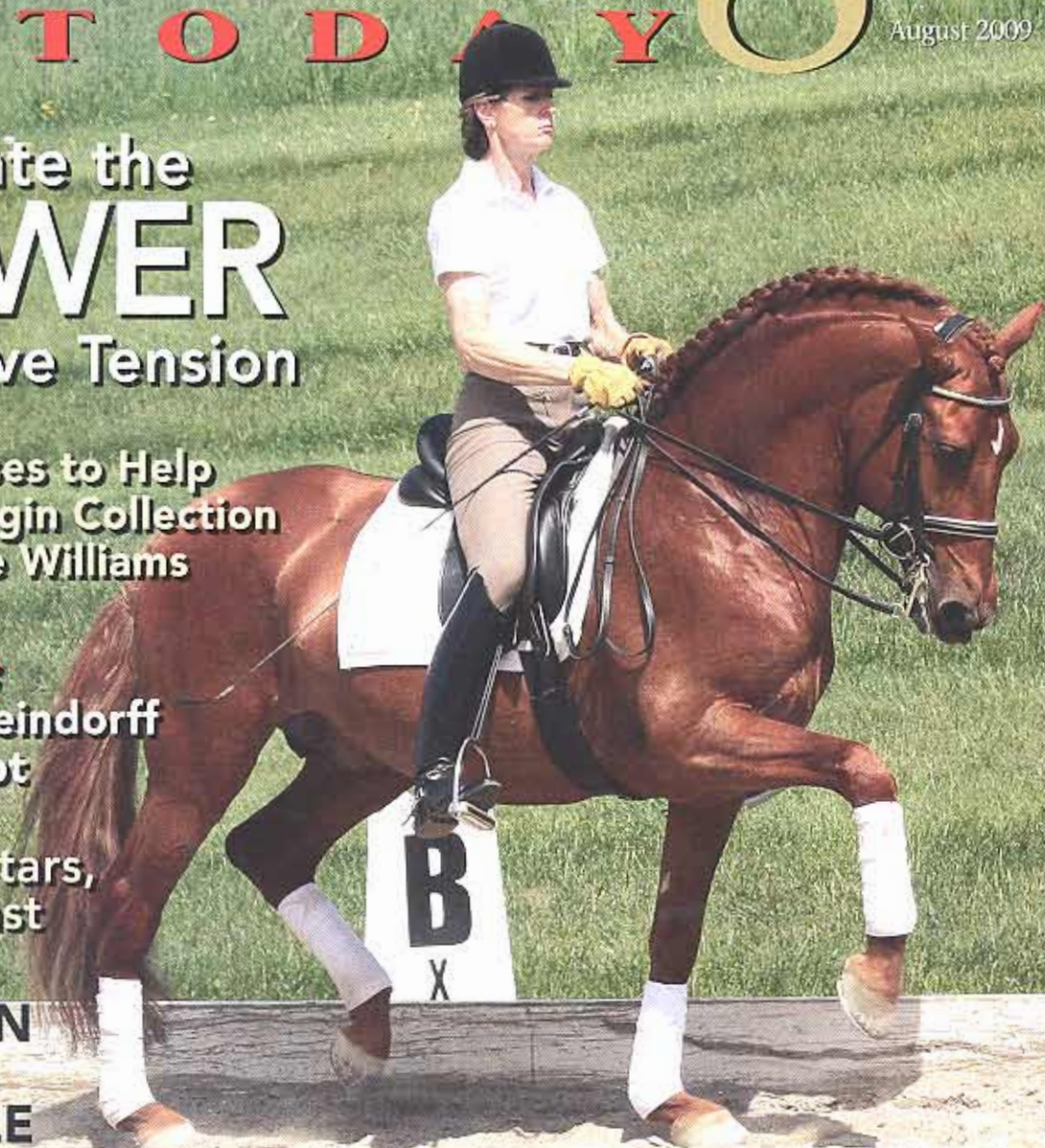
Create the
POWER
of Positive Tension

14 Exercises to Help
You Begin Collection
With George Williams

EXCLUSIVE:
Egon von Neindorff
Book Excerpt

"Cavalria" Stars,
Home at Last

**A MODERN
KNIGHT &
HIS CASTLE**



Felicitas von Neumann-Cosel
rides Tonico Do Top

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Breeding for Black
Saving a Rare Breed
Baroque Horse Gallery

Dressage

TODAY

AUGUST 2009

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Frédéric Chetou, courtesy Cavalia

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ABOUT THE COVER: Felicitas von Neumann-Cosel rides Tonico Do Top, a 10-year-old Lusitano stallion.
Photo by Mary McKenna

To learn more about the sport and art of dressage, visit DressageToday.com.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Baroque Horse Backs

Q My 12-year-old, 16-hand Lusitano mare has no movement in her back. How can I get her to swing more through her back? Name withheld by request

KRISTINA HARRISON

A Let me first say that you're correct in seeking more back movement from your horse. We always want to encourage the maximum amount of swing from any horse, as it is one of the basic indicators of correct work, which, over time, is a factor in ensuring ongoing soundness.

I have a question for you: Is your seat quiet and are you able to follow the motion of your horse without gripping with your legs or balancing on the reins? Lusitanos can be sensitive. If you are tense anywhere in your body, you might be inadvertently causing your mare to contract her back muscles in an attempt to protect herself. Grinding down on a horse's back, tense thighs and a nagging lower leg can all be contributing factors that add up to a tight back. If you suspect that your seat needs work, lessons on the longe line on your mare or another suitable horse will do wonders for developing a balanced and independent seat.

Also, check saddle fit. If possible, experiment with different saddles to see if her way of going changes.

A tight back indicates a lack of suppleness, and we're lucky in dressage to have a myriad of methods and exercises to help address this. Before you ride, try longeing your mare with side reins, adjusted slightly loose—nose in front of the vertical when stretching her head out toward you as you are standing in front of her—to encourage her to reach for the bit. Make sure you keep her on an accurate circle since that will help maximize the gymnastic benefits of longeing. To do this, remain standing

in the center of your circle, in one spot, not moving around. You can ask your mare to spiral in and out at the trot by shortening and lengthening the longe line, which will also help loosen her up.

Under saddle, incorporate cavalletti work as often as possible. This will help your mare to use herself correctly and raise her back. Make sure you don't allow her to rush; you want impulsion, not speed. Be sure to keep an even rhythm. You can also set up a series of cavalletti on a 15- to 20-meter circle and, depending on her level of strength, ride smaller or larger circles over them. Always encourage your mare to stretch her neck out to the bit. Keep your rides playful and light, letting her stretch down and out in between more collected exercises. Experiment with slowing the tempo of her trot to see if you get more lift and swing in her back. Change her bend frequently, doing lots of serpentines, circles of various sizes and lateral work, such as shoulder-in, leg yielding or half passes.

Shoulder-in is one of the fundamental dressage exercises and is beneficial in building suppleness and increasing suspension. It stretches the horse's outside shoulder while strengthening the inside hind leg. I recommend alternating it with haunches-in and half pass. Remember to keep it playful, ride only a few strides at a time and don't get stuck in any one exercise. Frequent changes of direction and transitions between gaits and within them can also help to engage her back.

Rider Hands at Canter

Q I was told to move my hands back and forth at the canter. Aren't I supposed to keep my hands quiet regardless of the gait?

Joe McGuire
Blacksburg, Virginia

MARY ANN GRANT

A The hands of the rider always belongs to the mouth of the horse. For this to happen, there must be movement. Understanding this puts you on the path of learning classical horsemanship.

The horse has a natural motion of the neck in canter. Think of a racehorse going down the stretch. The jockey clearly follows the motion of the neck with his hands up and down the crest. Dressage riders have to do the same, only in a quiet way. Let's look at the three beats of a horse's canter in more detail to understand why we need movement:

In the first beat—the strike-off—the rider coordinates the half halt with the jumping and pushing outside hind leg of the horse. This is the upward phase of the canter in which the rider feels the croup lower and the withers lift.

In the next two phases of the canter—the second and third beats—the horse's neck moves out and down, and the rider's hands must follow. If you find this confusing, it helps to look at the horse's ears. They will go down on the second and third beats and back up on the first beat to start the sequence over again.

Visualize a straight line from your elbow all the way to the corner of the horse's mouth. Think of your hand as a part of the bridge from your elbow to his mouth. When your upper arm and elbow come behind your core, you are no longer riding toward the horse's mouth. When your upper arm stays close to your core, your elbow, wrist and fingers can have enormous elasticity to follow the movement of the horse without dropping the contact.

A supple and self-balanced seat is a prerequisite for this. The hands belong to the horse's mouth, and the seat belongs to the saddle. Always ask yourself when riding, *If I take away my reins and stirrups, will I stay in balance?* Remember, all riders

lose their balance from time to time.

To find the right amount of movement with your hands, try this exercise: While walking your horse on a long rein, study his ears and follow the movement in an exaggerated way. Be diligent about keeping a straight line from your elbow to the bit. Notice how your elbow joint has to open and close to achieve this. If it does not, your line from elbow to bit is probably not straight.

Next, ride canter-walk transitions on a circle. In the strike-off to the canter, practice following your horse's ears like you did in walk. Think about your elbow joint, and don't let your upper arm come behind your body. When you are able to ride small half halts to balance the canter without the horse's hind leg slowing down, transition to walk and focus on letting your horse's ears fall down in the second and third beat. Don't worry if he falls on the forehand in the beginning. To correct that, quickly jump the hind legs back to canter. If you have been blocking your horse with your hand in the second and third beat, it will take many repetitions until the horse stops bracing himself in the second and third beat. Focus on your hands not blocking at this moment.

If canter-walk transitions are too challenging, ride trot-canter-trot-medium trot transitions on the circle. After the medium trot phase, half halt and immediately strike off to canter. See how many canter strides you can take without going against the motion of the neck and ears. Make small forward circles with your hands. The medium trot will activate your horse's hind leg enough to give you good balance in the canter so you can practice the technique. If your horse becomes unbalanced and you have trouble with the small forward circles, transition to trot. Then, transition to medium trot, half halt and strike off to canter again.

Low Heels

Q My 9-year-old Thoroughbred mare has very low heels. I've heard that this might cause soundness issues. Since I've started to ride her on a daily basis at First Level, I'm concerned. What is the best solution to deal with low heels?

Lillian McKenzie
Anaheim, California

BOB SMITH, BA, CF

A Long toes usually accompany hooves with low heels. It is the combination of a long toe and low heels that creates lameness issues in horses. The long toe leverages the foot backward against the heels, causing the heels to crush and collapse. As the angle of the hoof lowers, the weight placed on the heels increases. A hoof angle in the low 40 degrees will have over 70 percent of a horse's weight on his heels. A horse with a hoof angle in the middle 50 degrees will have less than 50 percent of his weight on the heels. Increased weight-bearing on the heels creates a host of lameness issues for any horse.

Your horse's low heels may be a matter of genetics or may be farrier-induced. Horses with excessively long pasterns will have a tendency for long toes and low heels. This type of conformation makes it more difficult to resolve low heels than farrier-induced low heels.

A long-toe/low-heel horse will have a tendency to land toe first, which will shorten his stride. It is considered a precursor to lameness. In addition, the long toe/low heel will dramatically increase the pull of the deep flexor tendon on the navicular bone. The increased heel weight will cause the horn tubules of the heels to bend and collapse forward toward the toe.

A low-heel horse develops a cycle that hinders the rehabilitation of his

Mary Ann Grant

was long-listed for the USET from 1998 to 2000 and has been showing successfully at Grand Prix. Growing up under the tutelage of her parents, Carole and Chuck Grant, she is also a Young Rider silver medalist and a USDF gold medalist. Based in Wellington, Florida, she operates Grant Farms.



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Hilary Frait

Kristina Harrison

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Have a question about dressage? E-mail it to Dressage.Today@EquiNetwork.com or send to Dressage Today, 656 Quince Orchard Rd., Suite 600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878—Ask the Experts is compiled by **Reina Abelshausen**.