

# The Training of the Rider

**Part 1**

# 1. ➤ The Training of the Rider



## 1. The Rider's Training Path

An essential element of German riding theory is the well-known and much-discussed scale of training for the horse.

Somewhat less well-known, although already described in the Guidelines of the German FN, is a similar arrangement for the rider, The Rider's Training Path, which consists of four sections:

- **Seat and training of the seat**
  - **Application of the aids**
    - **Feeling**
    - **Influence**

In recent years increasing importance has been placed on including and using knowledge acquired in the field of sport education and in particular also the theory of movement in the training of riders, therefore it seems a good idea to develop this rather meagre framework somewhat further and expand its content.

In this connection it is well worthwhile taking a more precise look at the "Ethical Principles of the True Horseman"<sup>1</sup> compiled and published by the German Equestrian Federation (FN) (published for the first time in 1995). Accordingly all riders – whether beginners, more advanced or even active competition riders – repeatedly have to be reminded about what a great responsibility the human being takes on if he wants to become actively involved in equestrian sport:

Breeders have been increasingly successful in recent decades in making horses available to riders which are particularly suitable for use under the saddle on account of their conformation as well as their inner qualities; it was possible to achieve this particularly by means of appropriate selection according to riding horse points and characteristics. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it is only as a result of competent, careful training and ongoing schooling that a horse becomes able to actually carry a rider on its back and not simply to bear him. In this connection everyone involved in the training of

### *The Ethical Principles*

Taking over of responsibility

Adapting to natural requirements

Health is of utmost significance

All horses are to be respected equally

The history of the horse is a historico-cultural heritage

Particular significance in the development of personality

The objective is optimum harmony

Orientation according to nature, ability and willingness to perform

Responsibility for the end of the horse's life

horses, whether as a rider or a trainer, must acquire as good knowledge as possible and also try to put this into practice in their daily work and continue to do so even on a medium and long-term basis. Judges also carry a lot of responsibility here because they prescribe what is either honoured positively or judged negatively, thus playing a very significant role in determining values, at least concerning competition riders.

Before dealing with the training aims for the rider in detail, it is worth thinking about the mental attributes which make it easier to deal with horses and in some cases are indeed essential pre-requisites for doing so:

- **Genuine respect for the creature and love of the animal**
- **Considerable empathy and willingness to understand**
- **Great patience and perseverance**
- **Absolute honesty towards oneself and willingness to admit to one's own mistakes**
- **Curiosity and a constant willingness to learn**

<sup>1</sup> The brochure is available free of charge from the Deutschen Reiterlichen Vereinigung e.V. (FN), Abteilung Mitgliederservice, 48229 Warendorf, Tel. 02581 6362-222, Fax 02581 63 62 333, E-Mail: pschaffer @fn-dokr.de

- Good concentration ability
- Reliable powers of observation, particularly for sequences of movement
- Discipline and self-control

These attributes will be stimulated and probably also further developed in the course of a correspondingly systematic and well supervised training.

Anyone who would like to practise our wonderful equestrian sport, whether as a “happy hacker” or a top performance rider, has the moral obligation to subject himself as well as his horse to training, at least to such an extent that both participants can enjoy this sport to the full for as long as possible without it ever being to the detriment of the horse.

Many people believe that riding is a form of sport in which performance comes principally from the horse and therefore that only the horse has to fulfil the relevant conditions. Obviously this is completely wrong! Also a happy hacker, whose sole aim is to enjoy riding his horse out in the countryside, has to be in a position whilst sitting on his horse to be well-balanced and make circumstances for the horse as easy as possible.

Before any training can actually start on the horse, the learner-rider must have good basic fitness. Otherwise it is absolutely essential to work on this at the same time. Modern lifestyles unfortunately mean that nowadays even children and teenagers often suffer from a lack of physical fitness. The same applies for the knowledge already referred to briefly above. Because riding involves a connection between two living beings which should harmonise as well as possible, this is one of the most demanding and complicated forms of sport. Precisely for this reason, in order to have enjoyment and success it is important to acquire as much knowledge as possible about horse and rider – in particular about inter-connections and dependences between them – and to be prepared to continue learning for as long as one continues to ride. This knowledge first ac-

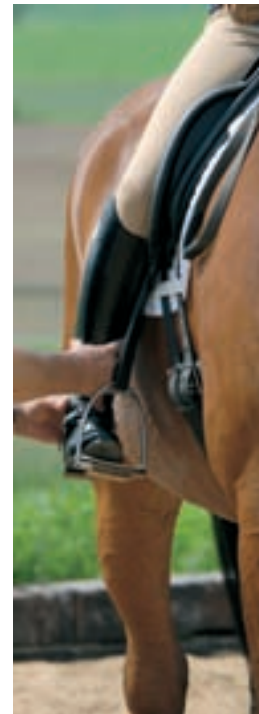
quires its full value, however, when it is carefully thought about, understood and filled with personal riding experience. Ideally theoretical and practical learning go hand-in-hand and complement each other in a positive way.

The diverse training aims on the way to becoming a good rider can be summarised in the following eight points. Here, just as in the training scale of the horse, it is important to realise that they do not represent individual stages which are entities in themselves and are finished with once they have been achieved, it is rather the case that, despite a prescribed sequence of succession, some of them must be aimed for on a parallel basis:

<b>The Rider's Training Path</b>	
• Trust and lessening of overwhelming respect	
• Suppleness and balance	
• Seat (in its various forms)	
• Feeling for movement and control/co-ordination	Good reactions
• Feeling for the horse and its movement	
• Aids and their co-ordination	
• Riding technique	
• Influence	

### 1.1 Trust and lessening of overwhelming respect

Particularly people who have not grown up with (large) animals, perhaps not had any form of closer contact with animals whatsoever, will initially have overwhelming respect for horses. This is perfectly natural but it is also the reason why, before beginning any actual riding training as such, a certain degree of trust has to be developed, in-





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Even grooming is a good opportunity for developing and strengthening a relationship of trust between rider and horse

initially in one's own ability and subsequently, of course, also in the horse. This is to be done by means of learning correct handling and developing the confidence required to do this properly, e.g. when leading the horse and grooming it. Mistakes made in this phase, perhaps because of too little information or a lack of competent instruction, can very quickly lead to fear. Nevertheless, it must also be considered that carelessness or thoughtlessness in dealings with horses can indeed be dangerous. As a result of their relatively large body mass they have – even when moving slowly – a very considerable energy potential. The considerably weaker human body is thus immediately at a disadvantage if a potentially dangerous situation should arise. From the very beginning onwards it is therefore important to adhere to the principle that the beginner can reduce his overwhelming respect in the fastest and best way if well-trained horses are available. These horses should have an intact sense of trust in humans but at the same time have learned to accept them as higher ranking beings.

In this early phase of training everything can proceed much more easily and more quickly if the prospective rider also acquires theoretical knowledge about the horse, for example

- typical characteristics and features of its nature,
- the development and training of its sensory organs based on its history,
- its naturally innate requirements which are important concerning how it is kept etc.

How this knowledge is best acquired, whether in theory lessons, by means of books and videos, or explanations given by the instructor in the context of dealings with the horse, depends entirely on the pupil's individual learning circumstances; however an ideal solution would be a combination of all possibilities.

### 1.2 Suppleness and balance

Suppleness and balance are essential requirements for enjoyable and good riding. Both are intrinsically linked as well as inter-dependant:

A rider who has serious balance problems – for whatever reasons this may be – will never be able to relax properly, either physically or mentally (see also “Suppleness of the Rider” in this connection).

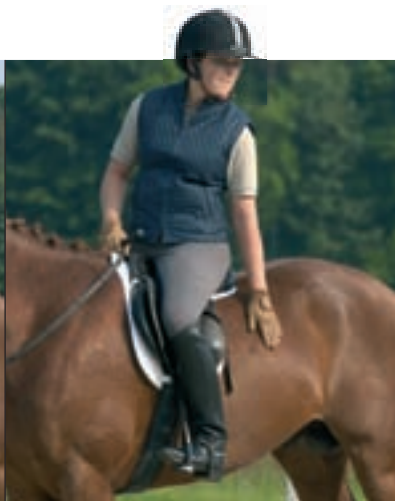
Likewise it is impossible for anyone who is completely cramped up or even just rather tense, because he is frightened of a particular horse for example, to be able to sit on this horse in any sort of balanced way.

Suppleness means that the rider, whilst being fully concentrated and perhaps even with a very strong will to perform well, becomes neither physically nor mentally tense, so that his breathing, circulation and entire locomotory system function in a good and economical way (see also “Suppleness of the Horse” in this connection).

How well and how fast the prospective rider can learn to balance and gradually learn to maintain this sense of balance even in the case of unexpected, abrupt movements and changes of direction on the part of the horse, depends on his natural disposition as well as previous train-



Gymnastic exercises, on the lunge for example, improve the rider's suppleness



Praising the horse by patting it behind the saddle also relaxes the rider



Balanced forward seat

ing and experience e.g. in other forms of sport. Also with regard to motor functions - as implied above - the restricted possibilities available nowadays for youngsters to play and run around mean that, predictably, often not even children have a great spectrum of experience and scope in this context. Specific associated gymnastic exercises can also be very helpful here, in some cases such extra training is absolutely essential.

Also with regard to suppleness and balance the well-schooled, supple and balanced horse is the best schoolmaster.

### 1.3 The seat and its different forms

In the "Guidelines for Riding and Driving Volume 1" and German riding theory a differentiation is made between three seat forms:

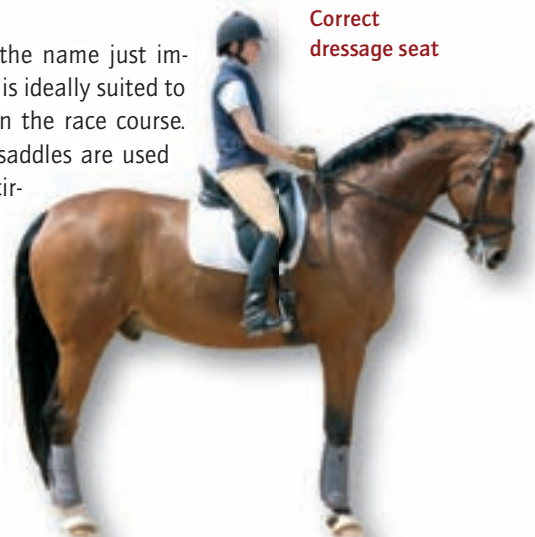
- Dressage seat
- Light seat
- Racing seat

The dressage seat, according to German riding theory, is also the basic seat which should be learnt first. There is a good reason for this because it is the seat in which it is easiest for most

riders to find their balance at the beginning. More will follow on this subject later.

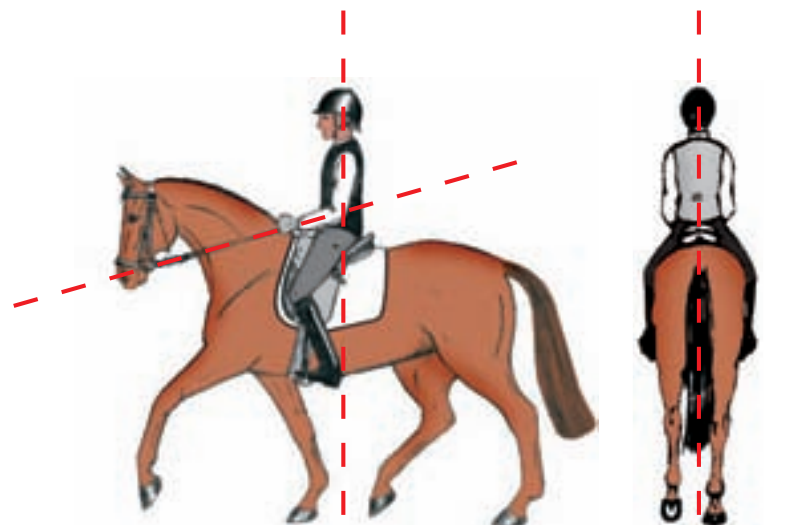
The super-ordinate term "forward seat" covers all seat forms in which, as a result of the trunk leaning forward out of the hips, the weight is shifted more onto the thigh, the knee and the feet standing in the stirrups, in other words the horse's back is relieved somewhat of the rider's weight). These include the forward seat and the seat on the young horse. (In German there is a special word for this: the Remontesitz), the cross-country seat as well as the jumping seat (the seat between the jumps and in the various phases of the jump).

The racing seat, as the name just implies, is the form which is ideally suited to riding at high speed on the race course. In some cases special saddles are used here, in any case the stirrups are kept extremely short. The rider's hip and knee joints are bent at a considerable angle so that he has maximum spring electricity in his legs and is in a position to absorb



Correct dressage seat

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These straight lines can be easily recognised when the dressage seat is correct

almost completely the movements of the horse at a flat out gallop. Consequently, the horse no longer needs to lift up the rider's weight with every stride. The strongly angled rider's legs may be compared with the longer suspension forks of a cross-country motorbike. As very little direct contact exists between rider and horse in this seat form, outstanding body control and a 100% sense of balance is required on the part of the rider.

Particularly in the context of motoric learning (learning of body motion), it is a great advantage when the learning abilities to develop a command of the body and a sense of balance which prevail in childhood and early teenage years can be used for riding.

According to German riding theory, the dressage seat is to be taught – for good reasons – as the first seat. It is easier to learn than the forward seat on account of the fact that it is relatively easy to sit in a fairly balanced position in the dressage seat. In the case of the forward seat the upper body, including the head, has to be carried and stabilised by the muscles.

The following text describes the dressage seat and, based on examples, explains the functional reasons behind the rules which apply concerning this seat and why they always have to



Correct seat, pelvis can swing with the horse's motion

be seen in relation to the specific circumstances of the individual rider and his horse regarding body conformation and proportions. The important claim in this connection which exists in the theory of movement "function takes precedence over form" always applied for the sensible and competent trainer. Exaggerated formalistic teaching and judging always bore testimony to a lack of understanding.

At this point I should like to refer to an image which gives the riding pupil a good idea of the position in which it is easiest for him to balance:

**The rider must take up a position from the head to the feet in which it would be possible for him to stand in well-balanced posture even without the horse, should the horse suddenly disappear from under him!**

This image, moreover, also applies for the forward seat.