

THE FRAME/OUTLINE

(A Subject for 2005 - Carolyn Lieutenant)

In Dressage it is more comfortable for the horse to move in a frame or outline, one that is of course, acceptable to its degree of training.

Lately we have all become very aware of **THE TRAINING SCALE**.

1. Rhythm
2. Suppleness
3. Contact

Without these three requirements the next three can never be satisfactorily achieved.

4. Impulsion
5. Straightness
6. Collection

If the horse is not trained to respond to the rein aids in an elastic manner, it does not matter how vigorously and "forward" you ride your horse. In other words, if one of the first three of the above requirements is missing, the horse cannot satisfactorily progress through to the final three steps.

RHYTHM: Most horses have rhythm; i.e. the regularity of steps in each pace. They must be of equal distance and equal duration.

SUPPLENESS: Demonstrated by absence of tension and showing a fluent or loose way of going with confidence to take the reins **FORWARD** and **DOWN** at any time.

CONTACT: this is absolutely paramount to achieving and improving the first two points on the Training Scale.

From the very beginning the horse should be trained never to go against the hand or bit, that is the muscle under his neck should never be tightened in such a manner that he attempts to use it to push the nose out or up. After all don't we teach our young horses to lunge with elastic side reins on a circle to develop rhythm, suppleness and to understand that they can easily and happily move more forward into and "through" reins?

This is **CONTACT** - reliable, comfortable, stable and uncomplicated without the unbalancing effect of the rider in the beginning. The horse becomes confident that the **connection** will always be there, be stable and elastic. He learns to be confident to make **transitions** within the paces or between the paces as he will know that nothing is going to change. The trainer on the lunge rein takes care that their commands are subtle and elastic. (Personally, I lunge with an outside rein only and the lunge line running from my hand through the bit and the beginning of it clipped to the buckle on the girth). This way the horse is always in contact with both reins as the inside one simulates the giving and taking of the rider's inside hand and flexion can be kept and the horse is encouraged forward to always keep a connection with the outside rein. This also prevents the shoulders and quarters from swinging out.

When the rider has trained or warmed up the horse on the lunge then he should get on and ride the same way, i.e. pushing with the inside leg to maintain contact with the outside rein and inside flexion is created with a supple inside rein. The horse will now be in FRAME.

As previously stated, the FRAME in which the horse is ridden depends completely on his degree of training and also the stage of warm up on any particular day. Even the more advanced horse should never be expected to be ridden in an unrealistically short or compressed outline as, like with any athlete, there should be a systematic warm up period.

How high, how low, how round, how short???? He has to be **COMFORTABLE**.

The neck must act like a shock absorber in order for the rider to keep an elastic connection. It must be stressed that at any time the horse should be able to be ridden forwards and downwards especially when tension exists. If this is done correctly, it is very instrumental in lifting and rounding the horse's back, making it easier for the hind legs to step actively under the body with well angulated hocks. Yes, the horse will be behind the vertical in this frame as flexion through the poll must always be maintained. The rider must always take care never to pull the neck in or down but rather activate the horse by always starting from behind to create energy which in turn encourages lightness. The nose of the horse must not be dragged back into his chest or under neck but rather the front line of his face could point to his front feet or to his knees.

The horse needs only to be so low that he cannot block in front of the wither - there should be no dip in his top line. How high or how low can depend very much on each individual horse and also its age, stage of training, retraining, disposition etc and the knowledge and ability of the rider and what he aims to achieve.

One things must be clear - when the horse "gives" the rider must "give " also, or in other words, stop doing what they are asking, just simply keep the connection by sending the horse actively forward. There is nothing more confusing for a horse that is not soft or supple in the neck to have a connection that is too loose with the rider (it is like a jerk in the mouth when the contact is retaken). However, if the horse is correctly 'through' the momentary loss of contact will not affect him. This is the aim of the 'give and retake the reins' in the new dressage tests.

If the horse does not move freely forward from the rider's aids - in other words is lazy - it will be impossible to keep him in a frame and most points in the Scale of Training will never be correctly achieved. It must be noted that a rider without a correct independent position, supple arms and hands, will find it difficult to keep an elastic connection. Instructors should always address these problems.

The horse will NOT be on the forehand if he is ridden forward from behind with active hocks because the stretching of the top line extends all the way back to his tail and lifts the back and allows it to swing. (If however, the flexion at the poll is lost and the horse leans or attempts to pull the reins away from the rider, the "lifting" effect is lost and the neck drops in the shoulder and then the horse will be on the forehand.)

He should be able to work in all three paces in a FRAME and like this show transitions between and within the paces. In this way the quarters are able to step under and develop the carrying power as well being able to thrust forward. Only then can you say your horse is truly "through".

How long is the horse ridden like this? He should always start off being able to be ridden forward, down and round each day you begin your training session until he seems happy and submissive and responding to the aids and making transitions without resistance.

Now the horse is ready to be ridden "up" with the poll the highest point as required in dressage tests. At all times the OUTLINE/FRAME of the horse should give the impression of harmony existing between him and his rider. A good guideline for this is that the rider should appear to be sitting in the middle of his horse, an impression

often lost when the horse is JAMMED in the neck causing the hindquarters to trail as they inevitably will in this situation. The incorrect positioning of the neck very easily blocks the ability of the hindquarters to step under the horse's body. Even a horse with a high neck can be on the forehand.

Judges should be able to make their assessment at a glance simply from the general impression of the horse and rider appearing before them. Obviously, horses with a harmonious outline will have a better chance to carry out the requirements of the test, but care should be taken to ensure that the OUTLINE/FRAME is applicable to the level of competition. In other words, a Preliminary horse is not expected to be in the same frame as an Elementary horse just as the medium horse will not be as ROUND as the grand Prix horse. All horses should however be ON THE BIT.

A horse can never be said to be ***TOO COLLECTED***, this is an expression often heard. If the outline is harmonious then the horse can correctly perform the movements of the test with ease.