Arizona Dressage Association

The Centerline



Through The Back

by Susan Downs Parrish, Ph.D.

Science, physics, and methodology are terms fundamental to dressage, but not generally associated with dressage. The idea of dressage as art is widely accepted, although what we riders present is not always pretty. The moment we put our foot in the stirrup, we are presented with the physical nature of the horse, and as any experienced rider will tell you, physics will be reckoned with. So, dressage is art based on science, and methodology is at the heart of science. My study of neuropsychology taught me the power of a proven methodology. In science, you live or die based on your methodology. In dressage, a horse's performance reflects the rider's equitation/methodology. The Training Scale Pyramid is an overview of a sequence of conditions to be addressed in training. It's not a methodology.

As a neuropsychologist, I relied on a five-hour battery of tests, in which all items were individually administered; at no time was the client sitting in front of a computer responding to questions via a keyboard. I followed a manual that instructed me in what to say for each item in each test, except the IQ test which had its own manual. Having given the Wechsler IQ Test many, many times, following instructions while maintaining rapport with the person being tested was not new to me. The battery was the Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Test Battery, the HRB. The HRB was validated more than thirty times. This means that this five-hour battery was given in more than thirty different settings, and, about

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If the photo is a riding photo, a helmet is required.

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87% of the time, found to correctly identify subjects as impaired or normal. The validation of the HRB indicated that the manual did its job guiding the person administering the tests, and that the tests measured brain functions.

In case you are holding your breath—breathe! I am not going to present a methodology for dressage comparable to that of the HRB. My reason for going into detail about the power of the HRB is to spark a desire in riders to work on their equitation. Good equitation is at the heart of good dressage, and we can all improve. I am going to offer some ideas about equitation that have the power to change your relationship with your horse. These ideas are from the teachings of Charles de Kunffy and have been approved by Maronda, my mare.



The phrase—through the back—is familiar to most dressage riders. It's a basic, but I wonder how many of us understand the dynamics involved in this concept. Lately, Maronda has been enlightening me. I have been refining my feel for what I call the drape—elbows back, chest expanded, and legs hanging loosely along the sides of the horse. The drape may sound passive but it's not. It requires an engaged seat. Until lately, my hands were too widely separated as I focused on my elbows. Now my hands are closer together, mostly touching, while my elbows remain back and close to my torso.

When I move my hands closer together, Maronda's head tilt during shoulder-in disappears and her bend improves. Almost perfect but not quite—she doesn't always reach for the bit. Thinking about Maronda's reluctance to reach for the bit, reminds me of something Charles taught me years ago—crossing my shoulders.

Crossing the shoulders is easier to demonstrate than to describe, but here goes. With elbows back and hands together, move one shoulder forward and one back simultaneously. Don't make the mistake of leaning forward. Maronda responds after a couple of crossings. If done correctly, the movement travels down the rider's torso and engages the rider's seat bones. The result is that, without using the hands, the horse seeks contact with the bit. If the reins are too short, the horse will be behind the vertical. The remedy is to length the reins by one inch or more. If done right, crossing the shoulders causes the horse to work through its back, a necessary condition for correct movement.

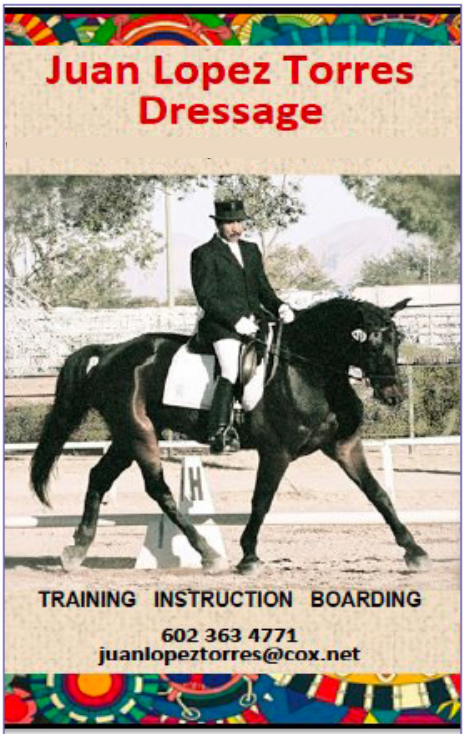
Correct equitation/methodology encourages Maronda to move through her back which makes it easier for her to bend through her body and collect. She can sit and carry. In the saddle, the feeling is one of being on top of a ball rather than sitting on a rectangle. Another benefit is that Maronda is more responsive to my leg aids and she is less likely to click of the bit with her teeth.

Dressage equitation is more challenging than following a proven methodology in neuropsychology. Along with an intellectual understanding of concepts, a rider must exert almost perfect control of his or her body, on a moving horse. The activity is physical as well as conceptual. A daunting challenge but the rewards are phenomenal. Correct equitation begins with a correct seat. Charles's notion of sitting 20 degrees behind the vertical develops a strong torso and an engaged seat. I have written about this idea a number of times, and I can always hear the clicking of tongues and see the shaking of heads. Click or shake, but sit, lean back, and feel your seat bones. Do it on the lunge line if necessary, but do it! Your torso/core isn't strengthened immediately, but with practice you will get stronger.

Let me finish with an example of the power of an engaged seat developed from leaning behind the vertical. Maronda performs one-tempi lead changes willingly, but with too short a stride. A week ago, as she quickly did the ones, Charles seemed to whisper in my ear, "Susan, lean back, engage your seat." I followed Charles's instructions, and Maronda lengthened her strides. What a difference! Suddenly, I found myself on top of the ball, and I was in charge. The one-tempis are not perfect but they are improved, and more importantly, Maronda has a better understanding of what is being asked of her.

If your equitation/methodology is true, you will be in charge, so make sure you know where you're going. Don't forget what follows your halt at X.





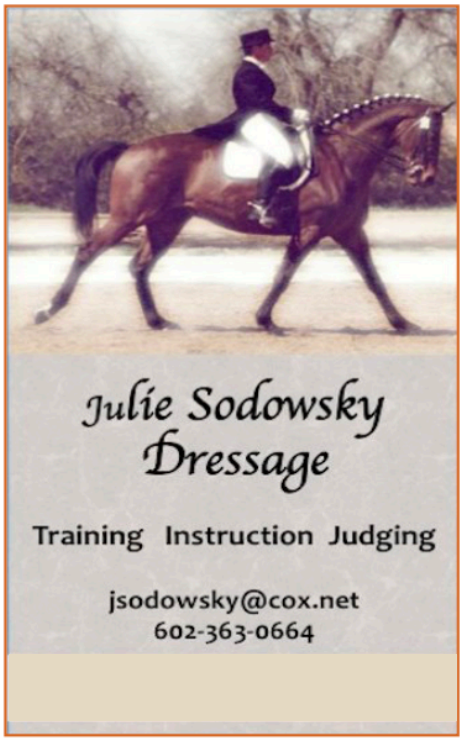
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THE CLOSING DATE FOR THE ADA SUMMER HEAT SHOW IS

3 WEEKS BEFORE THE SHOW!

JUNE 15TH – JUNE 16TH

CLOSING DATE IS MAY 25TH






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Follow the link to: https://azdressage.org/ada-futurity-competition/

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2024 Schooling Show & Clinic Dates

March 16th – Clinic- Kerry Picken- Equestrian Pilates –Williamson Valley
May 18th – Schooling Show- Dori Vlatten-Schmitz – Chino Valley Eq Park
June 1st – Clinic- Michell Combs – American Ranch, Prescott
July 20th – Schooling Show- Krista Peek – American Ranch, Prescott
Sept 7th – Schooling Show- Michell Combs – Chino Valley Eq Park

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.nacofada.com

2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY

12-14: CARA Champagne I & II

FEBRUARY

3-4: ADA Spring Celebration: WestWorld, Scottsdale

MARCH

9-10: TDC March Madness: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

16: NAC Clinic Equestrian Pilates with Kerry Picken: Williamson Valley

APRIL

20-21: Dressage at Bar A

24: ADA Western Dressage in The Desert: WestWorld, Scottsdale

MAY

18: NAC Schooling Show: Chino Valley Equestrian Park

JUNE

1: Clinic with Michell Combs: American Ranch, Prescott

7-9: Roadrunner I: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

15-16: ADA Summer Heat: WestWorld, Scottsdale

JULY

20: NAC Schooling Show: American Ranch, Prescott

AUGUST

16-17: Roadrunner II: Pima County Fairgrounds, Tucson

SEPTEMBER

7: NAC Schooling Show: Chino Valley Equestrian Park, Michell Combs

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

2-3: ADA Fall Fiesta: WestWorld, Scottsdale

9-10: TDC Fall Festival I & II: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

DECEMBER

Our Mission:

The Arizona Dressage Association is a not-for-profit organization whose goal is to promote the advancement of classical dressage through educational opportunities and programs, and the rigorous evaluations received at recognized and schooling dressage shows.

ARIZONA DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION
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