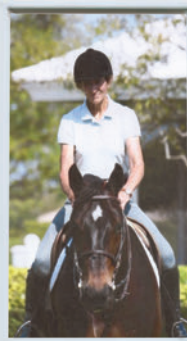


JULIE
ULRICH



Two Sides
to the Story
of a Life with
Horses



PACKING
MY BAGS

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CONTENTS

Introduction

1

Chapter One: It Began with a Deal

5

Chapter Two: Uprooted

11

Chapter Three: The First New Beginning

15

Chapter Four: Buying at the Sales

21

Riding Lesson: The Selection Process

24

Chapter Five: Building a Future

29

Riding Lesson: A Story About Michelangelo

34

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Chapter Six: Introduction to Dressage
37

Riding Lesson: It All Begins with Stretching
44

Chapter Seven: Into the Chase
47

Riding Lesson: The Balance of the Rider
52

Chapter Eight: Summer Camp Era
55

Riding Lesson: Talent and Method
58

Chapter Nine: Friars Gate Farm
61

Riding Lesson: Choosing Your Method
64

Chapter Ten: Florida Winter Circuit
69

Riding Lesson: Improving the Hind Leg of the Horse
74

Chapter Eleven: Ways to Train a Rider
77

Riding Lesson: The Use of the Thigh and Knee
82

Chapter Twelve: Professional Spirit
85

Chapter Thirteen: The Second New Beginning
89

Riding Lesson: A Short Dissertation on the Half-Halt
96

Chapter Fourteen: Working Student Program
99

Riding Lesson: Riding without Stirrups and Sitting the Trot
104

Chapter Fifteen: It Takes a Village
109

Riding Lesson: Invented in Medieval Times: The Shoulder-In
114

Chapter Sixteen: The Le Goff Influence
117

Riding Lesson: Improving the “*Gallop Utile*” through Dressage
124

Chapter Seventeen: Middleburg Life
129

Riding Lesson: The Magic of the Longe Line
136

Chapter Eighteen: The Third New Beginning
141

Riding Lesson: An American Appreciation of the French System
148

Chapter Nineteen: Horse Dealing 101
151

Riding Lesson: Natural Balance
158

Chapter Twenty: Timeout to Find Roots
161

Chapter Twenty-One: Mixing France and Florida
167

Riding Lesson: Communication with a Horse by His Rider
174

Chapter Twenty-Two: Enter Kevin Staut
177

Riding Lesson: Training the Horse to His Personal Best
182

Chapter Twenty-Three: Kevin's New Beginning
187

Riding Lesson: Recognizing the Limit
194

Chapter Twenty-Four: The Sport of Kings and Other Adventures
199

Epilogue
205

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Recommended Reading
207

Acknowledgments
209



CHAPTER FOUR

BUYING AT THE SALES

Buying horses at an auction was a great adventure, and was a big part of our early endeavors to find suitable horses to train in our newly constructed stable. I had never been to a horse auction when I married Richard, so he led the way as we made various experiments.

Close to home, in Milton, Massachusetts, Bushy's Auction was held every Tuesday night. All sorts of horses, including those destined for slaughter, were sent through a narrow corridor into the sales ring. Those suitable to be ridden were ridden. That presented my first public appearance in the auction world, as the owners of these horses would scan the crowd to find riders to present the horses. When in the sales ring, the auctioneer always announced that it was the horse and not the girl that was being sold. Every week he got a laugh with this line! I was honored to be asked and was quickly thrown up onto a horse. Richard was surprised to see me show up in a western saddle on a pretty, skinny bay. We were sold for around \$500, and Richard followed us out to make sure I did not persist in that activity.

Further afield, we attended Bunchy Grant Auction somewhere in New Jersey. It was a more sophisticated crowd. One had to scrutinize the horse carefully to see which parts were missing, or that the age of the horse corresponded with the teeth of the horse. It was at this sale that I saw Geraldine, the bidder for AmFran Horse Buyers. Those that she bought were shipped to France as horses for slaughter. She could tell the weight and category of a horse with a blink of an eye, and I was fascinated. The big, rawboned horses were less appealing to her than the short, round type. The category was more important than

the weight, I learned. Richard said that if one could calculate exactly as she did, one already had the base price of the horse passing through. I studied very hard. Richard was a special type of buyer. This was all new to me. I was learning the practical side of horse life.

The New Holland Auction, in the heart of the Amish country, was colorful, and, in my opinion, had the best quality horses. In order to go, we had to leave right after feeding our horses and drive very fast. After one of those top-speed trips, we raced into the sales area to see a handsome, tall gelding being led around the ring. We watched as the bidding stopped within our price range. Richard threw up his hand and we owned a horse!

As we had not registered as buyers, we were escorted to the auctioneer to make arrangements to pay. He looked us over. He thought for a moment, then asked Richard why he would buy a blind horse. We had arrived after the announcement that the horse, with two dark brown eyes, was sightless. The auctioneer patted me on the shoulder, lightly punched Richard on the arm, and told us to be more careful. We did not pay for the blind horse.

The most memorable auction for me was the Kinloch Farm Auction. It was a private affair after the tragic death of the owners, the Currier family, in the Bermuda Triangle. It was a dispersal sale of Andalusians and Welsh ponies. Our good friend, Ray LeBlanc, who loved to buy and sell anything, told us that we must all fly down to Washington to attend this historic sale. Ray said that he would handle the details. This should have raised flags. When we met at Boston Logan Airport, Ray was wearing a black Nehru-collared jacket and black slacks. He looked a little like a priest. Richard and I were dressed appropriately for a country auction. As we landed in Washington, we found that Ray had rented a huge black Cadillac with tinted windows in which we were to drive to the sale at Kinloch. He sat in the front. We were in the back seat. I began to feel ostentatious.

When we arrived at the auction, Ray declared that he would stand apart from us. As the sale went along, I suddenly saw Ray across the way, standing taller than the crowd in his black outfit. He looked a little like Abraham Lincoln in that setting. And he was bidding! I nudged

Richard as the hammer went down and Ray signed for the purchase of a huge Andalusian mare. We looked at each other and shook our heads. However, as the afternoon went on, Ray kept buying more. He bought another gray Andalusian mare and a total of three Welsh ponies. Each time he signed, smiling, as people near him began to congratulate him. As the sale drew to a close and we stood up to leave and drive to the airport, the auctioneer called us to attention to appreciate the top buyer of the sale: Richard Ulrich! Great applause rang out, as Ray, on his seat in his Nehru jacket, waved and then discreetly made the sign of the cross. Richard was frozen to his place, realizing that Ray had signed Richard Ulrich on all the paperwork.

Back in Massachusetts, we went to work to try to find buyers for the Andalusian mares. They couldn't jump. I tried. Eventually, one went as a donation to a Catholic mission in Peru to deliver mail. I think Alex Dunaif, a very young student at the time, convinced her mother to very kindly take the other. We easily disposed of the Welsh ponies. We never took Ray with us to another auction.

Auction buying was a favorite pastime for Richard, and I was to train the horses he found. He went to many auctions in Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio, and found a lot of nice horses. Even more accessible than the auction circuit was the daily possibility of going up and down the shed rows at the New England racetracks to ask for horses for sale. Most of our horses came from the racetrack and were very happy with their new lives. My students always had access to plenty of projects from both sources and it was good for their education.

Many of these reclaimed racehorses went on to be at the top level in dressage, due to Karl Mikolka's influence, as well as in the hunter and jumper disciplines. The most important quality in these unknown horses was their soundness. Any horse, being sound, can be trained to do high-level dressage and can also be taught to jump, within his limit. Years later, Reiner Klimke told me that it takes three years to achieve the Grand Prix level if one starts with a basically trained mature horse. But, he specified, only a certain number of them would be beautiful enough to compete. The others are like workbooks in school, to be filled in carefully, but not to be exhibited.



RIDING LESSON

At the beginning of the story is the process of selecting the horse with which to make the journey toward the goal you have set. There are a few old adages to apply, before getting down to details: no one has a crystal ball; only invest in a horse the sum which you can afford to lose; and, the perfect horse does not exist. Other volumes have been written and other lists of characteristics of a good horse have been made, all of which have good points. Here is yet another point of view.

The selection of a possible candidate with which to begin is based on the analysis of that candidate in several aspects. Imperfections, or areas of weakness, are important in direct proportion to the possibility of their correction.

Begin with a good look at the horse from the side to appraise his skeleton. This cannot be changed, although a very young horse, as it matures, will change somewhat in a predictable manner. There are certain skeletal types which can do one job more easily than another, so it is important to know the goal being set for each horse. For example, a horse with a neck set low on the shoulder, with strong hindquarters, is a type which may win the Arc de Triomphe race but may find a vertical of 1.50m or a pirouette a huge challenge.

A long wither and a long sloping shoulder, and a big and equilateral triangle formed by the structure of the hindquarters (hip-point of buttocks-stifle), are important points. There should be a horizontal line between the mouth of the horse and the point of the buttocks which is parallel with the ground. Good balance is important for longevity in most disciplines. The racehorse can be built downhill for speed, but to use this wonderful breed as an eventer or as a jumper, the balance must be correct.

The skeleton must be examined from all angles and very carefully. This will not change. Immature horses are the hardest to judge, and there are experts who can see a foal or a yearling, but who stay away from two-



THE SELECTION PROCESS

year-olds as being impossible to judge. From three years old, when the wither is defined, it is easier to judge.

The old adage, “Fat hides a lot of sins,” is accurate. It is easier to judge the skeletal construction of a normally fit horse. The importance of the skeleton is impossible to overestimate. A short blunt shoulder with a neck set on the lower part of that shoulder will be a problem for life. It cannot be offset by a big and strong hindquarter if one is to approach the higher levels. The right skeleton will produce efficient movement. Efficient movement enables longevity.

The horse with correct legs and good feet will outlast his crooked brother. Racehorses sometimes run only a year or two before going to the breeding shed. Sometimes, these horses stay sound that long with imperfect alignment, and are then used in breeding. That is a shame. In most disciplines, horses are used for 10 to 15 years. Poorly constructed horses usually become uncomfortable or lame long before they age out.

The second look at this candidate should be an analysis of his muscles. At five years or more, his muscles tell the tale of how he functions and of how well he is holding up to his training program. The ideal age at which to choose a horse is five or more because of this aspect. The muscle should be laid on uniformly over the whole horse. An area of no muscle will show a horse not functioning correctly. No topline, an ewe neck, or weak thighs all signify a potential lameness or a poor training program. A potential lameness may be apparent at the later movement analysis. Imperfect muscling due to a poor training program can be corrected. At this point, and to make a final analysis of the horse, it is necessary to move to the third look, his movement.

I begin with the horse in controlled liberty—that is, on a longe or in a jumping round—where I can see the gaits I wish to see:

The Walk: The length of the overstep should be six to eight inches. This



is terribly important. The walk is a cousin to the canter and all the faults of the canter are to be seen at the walk. A lesser overstep is evidence of a shorter than usual stride. Scope is an important factor in longevity. The walk should also have four distinct beats and no tendency to pace. Pacing at the walk tends to produce a four-beat canter which is weaker when collected. The walk deserves a good look.

The Trot: Any horse can do a working trot, and the hind hoof must land easily in the print made by the front hoof on the same side at this trot. Overstepping is less serious than not achieving this length of stride easily. The balance of the horse is never better than that displayed at the trot. There should be an imaginary line drawn between the mouth of the horse and the point of the buttocks. That line should be horizontal.

The Canter: A really important factor for me is that the horse prefers the canter to the trot. His hind leg, on the inside, should land under the seat of the rider. On a 20-meter circle with no side reins, there should be no sign of disuniting behind, especially the last stride of the canter before passing into the trot. The cadence moment, or the moment of suspension, should be easily identified but not exaggerated. The canter should be pure and of easy balance.

To see the horse ridden at the three gaits will make visible his reaction to the weight and the constraint of a rider. Problems with a rider that did not exist without the rider are usually perfected by a change of method. Problems preexisting in liberty, not so much.

To me, a horse should change his leads naturally, with little training, as he did as a young horse. In the flying change, one can see the tendencies at the jump, such as the loss of balance, anxiety, undue acceleration, and loss of hind leg function. So, it is important to see the flying change.

Jumping analysis is most valuable when done with a rider. Many mistakes are made by prejudging a horse in liberty who changes his technique dramatically with the weight of a rider. The technique should be good from the start. Good use of the shoulder, correct time spent in the



air, landing on each lead, and good use of the back. The height of the jump is less important than the style. The horse should focus, and back up if necessary, but not spook overly at a Liverpool or a flower box. If he exaggerates a good technique over a jump, which is visually impressive, he gets bonus points.

The fourth and most important look, or consideration, that must now be done is the analysis of character. This will be the deciding factor for the training and formation of the horse. The character should mesh with the rider or trainer. Do not start with a conflict of character. The character cannot be changed. The horse can be educated. His character will remain the same. If he is not liked by his handlers, he will not succeed. Some people like mares, some do not. Pick what corresponds with the program and the rider or trainer. Take into consideration the effect of the work the horse will do. A horse with a huge ego and self-assured naïveté will settle rapidly with the right gymnastic work over jumps. The same horse, in dressage, can be a bit of a bear for the first part of his training. In order to analyze the character, a two-week trial is ideal, or a long talk with his recent rider if no trial is possible.

The real work begins once you have made your choice. There is no bad choice if you invest all of your energies to justify that choice. There is no perfect horse. Choose wisely, work very carefully, and work hard. Do the best that you can to make the horse reach his potential. You cannot go further than his potential. Good luck!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SECOND NEW BEGINNING

The year it all changed began as a normal year. I took six horses and a working student to Florida, leaving Friars Gate with Richard, Karl, and Cindy. While I was in Florida, I received an invitation from Reiner Klimke to go to Münster, Germany. He did not promise that I could ride, but he did say that I could watch. I accepted the invitation and planned to go after the circuit in Florida was over. My horses could be on vacation. When I left, I had no idea how life would change.

When I came back, two months later, I was alone to run the whole of Friars Gate Farm. By myself! Karl had gone to the Steinkraus Farm; Richard had gone to the stable he loved, Dennis Riding School on Cape Cod; and Cindy had left to rebuild her own life. We had all worked to our absolute limit to create Friars Gate, sometimes at the sacrifice of individual dreams. Now, it seemed that we each had parts to add to our own dreams. Richard had arranged for a young couple, Ned and Brenda Doudican, to act as managers. They had been trained at Meredith Manor, and together we rapidly devised a system to manage this huge understaffed facility. I cut down on the number of horses as well as I could, but it was a lot of work for all.

I ran Friars Gate for five years by myself with working students. With the dissolution of all of our marriages, it became my goal to keep the spirit of learning and classical training unchanged at the farm that we all had developed. It was a huge test of my energy and a huge example of contribution to the stable by riders, owners, and parents. We competed a lot in New England, and I was lucky to have so many students to take an active part in the stable. Even with the help of a stream of a great group

of working students, it was the hardest work I had ever done. At the end of those five years, I came to the conclusion that I should have a smaller business that I could handle in less than 15 hours a day.

In choosing a new location, I had three important requirements. I love history, so I wanted to be in a historic area. I love fox hunting, so I wanted a hunting area. I also needed to be near an international airport for my travels to Europe. I selected, as a possibility, the Philadelphia area, where I knew I could be close to my friend Vince Dugan, who was an excellent horseman. Long Island, where my best friends Holly and Ralph Caristo had a stable, was also a possibility, and, finally, Middleburg in Virginia, where I knew no one, was on my list.

First, I went to visit Middleburg. I never went further than that! It was exactly what I wanted. I put Friars Gate on the market. We had a huge sale of equipment and tack in the indoor hall, with parents of my students helping and making coffee and sandwiches for all. Furniture in storage, we left for the Florida circuit as usual that year, but with no specific home in Middleburg in sight. The old retired horses went to a friend to await my arrangements for them in my next life. All was settled; it was over. Driving down the driveway for the last time was a very sad time indeed. But my new life beckoned! It was a very good decision and one that I never regret. Middleburg became my new hometown.

As the Florida circuit came to an end, I had still not made arrangements for a temporary home for me and my horses in Middleburg. My friend and announcer, Peter Doubleday, with his usual humor, took matters into his own hands one day on the loudspeaker system at the show. He announced that I was looking for a home in Middleburg and that everyone should spread the word to help me find stalls. I was in the schooling area on a horse at the time. Within five minutes, I was approached by Diane and Joe Fiore, longtime Middleburg residents, to offer me their stable as a base until I found a farm! I accepted right away! Hospitality is a part of life in Middleburg.

Living at Diane and Joe's farm, in the apartment over the stable, I had the time to go and get my horses from Massachusetts. Barnabus was at the end of his jumping career, having injured his deep flexor tendon twice. The paddocks at the Five Points Farm, where we were living, were

double-fenced. One could drive the tractor between the paddocks to mow. I turned my four retired horses out every night and brought them in during the hot days. I forgot that Barnabus would not stay in a paddock by himself, and I brought in the other three horses, leaving him to come in right after. Too late! He jumped both fences at once to change paddocks! Joe happened to see that and, as the entrepreneur that he is, ran into the barn to offer to buy him. I refused, of course, explaining that his tendon was connected by a thread. He was finished with jumping but still loved to do it.

Middleburg is a very well-preserved horse community only 90 minutes from Washington. The countryside is beautiful beyond belief. There are lots of dusty country roads and huge open-fenced fields, all paneled for the fox hunters to get across. Many of the old southern mansions are still privately owned. Middleburg is the home of the National Sporting Art Museum and *The Chronicle of The Horse*. Middleburg Training Track is well functioning for racehorses in training, and there are extensive polo fields, cross country training courses, and covered arenas to testify to an active horse culture. It's a paradise for people who love horses, hounds, and country living. And it is a friendly place where the eccentric are welcomed. Having immigrated from the staid New England atmosphere, where I stood out as too nonconformist, I was immediately at home in this environment.

I found a small farm by accident. I was told that a house and 10 acres were to be sold at auction in a very nice neighborhood called Unison. The owner had been sent to prison, and the bank was selling the house. I went to see, but the house was locked and one could not go in to see the rooms. There was a nice swimming pool filled with blackish water. I was so nervous as to what might be in the bottom of that pool that I went over to the Upperville Show, which was going on at the time, and brought friends back to look. I made Peter Doubleday dredge the pool to see if there was a body. Vince Dugan said, *"I could be very happy here."*

I went to the auction on the steps of the courthouse and bought the property. Carrying the keys, I went back to go look at where I would live. The house was rather Italian, with marble floors, and a dining room with mirrored walls. It was not at all what I had intended to buy, but the loca-

tion was wonderful, and I found a barn builder and a fencing company to go to work.

I met my neighbors in a big group, as the Middleburg Bank held a second small auction at my house to sell the contents. I bought the enameled Swedish wood stoves, and I bid on behalf of the bank president, John Hammond, on the leather chair. He did not want to be seen bidding at the bank auction. I had to convince Aileen DuPont, my new neighbor, not to bid on the wood stoves that I needed to heat my home. She yielded and became a great friend.

My furniture arrived and I was home. The horses moved over from Diane and Joe's farm, and I made a ring for the jumps that I had brought from Massachusetts. My barn had eight stalls, and I had two paddocks. Life was a vacation!

The first year in Virginia, I learned a lot. I had imagined that I would escape the cold winter of Massachusetts, but I found that the Virginia winter was almost as cold, but shorter by far, than the winter near Boston. The summer was what was shocking and dangerous for my horses. Sun damage was a real threat to white noses. Horses out in the sun became bleached to the degree that they were not presentable. Flies in the paddocks kept the horses on the move during the day. Horses could only be out at night, I learned. The first year in Virginia, I learned that a horse had died of heat prostration at the Commonwealth Park Horse Show in July. I began to ask questions about summer care for horses in Virginia.

I learned about the violent summer electric storms in the early evening. These presented a real danger to horses, both due to lightning striking horses and the possibility of stampeding horses running into the fences at night. I tried to turn out after the storms. If a storm came up after the horses were out, and it was dark, I left them alone as it was too dangerous to try to catch running horses at night. I built run-in sheds.

I learned about electrolytes. I learned about the local hay auction, where the seller follows you home with the load you bought. I learned to go downtown to the stone wall in front of the Safeway store to pick up day help from the group of workers waiting there. I learned that my car was going to be covered with dust, no matter what I did. And I learned

about snakes! They love a stone wall, and one must be very cautious. I was a community project, in terms of survival information that year.

The state flower of Virginia seemed to me to be poison ivy. It is everywhere, and I am very allergic. I had the worst case ever when the local boys that supplied my kindling gave me a load of dead branches of poison ivy to burn in my stoves. Even the smoke was toxic. The Master of one of the local hunts was Dr. James Gable, and he introduced me to the wonders of prednisone and saved my life!

My horses were happy with their new life of half paddock and half stall care. I saw the difference immediately in their personality and in their work. Freedom is so important to horses that they improve in all aspects of health when the ratio of confinement and liberty is in balance. This pertains to life in general and also to work under saddle. An underlying key to success is the degree of freedom available to the horse. I finally understood Klimke's ideas of lightness in riding.

In Middleburg, I made friends for life. Margaret Lee, a British lady who was the Head of the Foxcroft School Riding Department, was a unique character who upheld the protocol and tradition of behavior in the Hunt field. Once we were friends, she asked me to hunt the Foxcroft horses with the Middleburg Hunt as much as I could, in order that they would be fit for the alumni who visited to ride on the occasion. Gleefully, I accepted, and was met at the Hunt by Barney, her head groom, and a truck with my horse properly saddled and braided. After the hunt, I simply gave my horse in and drove home to ride the remainder of the day at the farm. It was heaven!

Margaret also invited me to use the school's cross-country course to school the horses that I was preparing for the eventing competition. My friend Jack Le Goff sent me young horses to school and hunt for a season, before their first year of competition. Hunting a season is the most natural way to introduce the cross-country phase of eventing to a young horse. Surrounded by 60 of his peers, there is rarely a horse who won't cross Goose Creek! Many top eventing stables are located in hunt country.

Margaret was a stickler for details. Her "*girls*" were always turned out perfectly, hairnets in place. She was an icon, and an era ended when

she died in a carriage accident on my road in Unison. Her funeral was enormous, and I told the story of her broken collarbone in Ireland when I took her hunting there.

My neighbors were all involved with horses. Muffy and Doug Seaton competed in driving competitions with ponies at a very high level. During the competition, there are three phases, one of which is dressage. Muffy felt that I could improve the dressage performance of her nice pony by riding it. Making a pony supple which is between shafts is very difficult. I agreed to ride the pony, but I did so very early in the morning, as he reared a lot and did some other not-so-classical maneuvers at the beginning. I did not wish to be seen! Doug used to fly in the driveway to try to catch my performance early in the morning on his way to open the country store in Unison. Muffy has trained a long string of top driving ponies and is regularly an international competitor. I took her to Ireland to hunt with me, as she did that as well.

When I arrived, my next-door neighbor was Marilyn Grubbs, who ran a rental stable. City folk would arrive on the weekends and ride her horses on the dirt roads surrounding the area. One was advised to be careful when driving or riding when the renters were out, as they were often out of control. Marilyn sold me five acres and sold the remaining acres to my best ever neighbor, Carey Shefte, and her partner, Bob. Marilyn moved to Montana, where a realtor had convinced her that there was a magic valley with a microclimate where it was warm all year round. We carried on.

Carey Shefte was rapidly taken to be a Whip for the Middleburg Hunt. She is, to this day, a pillar of that hunt, both as a Whip, assisting with the young entry, and supplying horses to the staff. She also, with her partner, flies hot air balloons. This changed the life of our neighborhood. We all went up! We all waved from the ground, and some of us drove the chase vehicle in a pinch. There were adventures!

One day, the assistant pilot was to go up with a group of city folk. He was a very large man. He checked the weather, and all was well. They took off just as a squall came over the Blue Ridge Mountains, just to the west of Unison. When the squall hit the balloon, the balloon hit an electric wire and caused sparks and a panic in the basket. All passengers wanted to land immediately in the field below and the pilot was obliged to do so.

The field was not level and the wind was blowing, so he instructed, very severely, that *“all passengers would remain in the basket”* until the balloon was down. The passengers were in an emotional state.

The problem arrived when the corpulent pilot was himself thrown out of the basket upon landing! Free of his weight, the balloon flew rapidly up and away with the passengers! Screams from the basket could be heard from a distance. *“Pull the yellow cord!” yelled the pilot from below. “Pull slowly! YELLOW CORD!”* One of the passengers partially heard him and yanked on the cord, deflating the balloon. The balloon landed pretty promptly from the height of the wires above. All finished with bruises and a trip back to the city with a tale to tell.

The horses had to become accustomed to both the sight of the giant balloon and the sound of the gas used to control the flight. One did not jump in the direction of an ascending balloon. The horse could make a big mistake at the jump if he was staring at the balloon. When a rider was needed as ballast, that rider was excused from his or her lesson to go up in the balloon, as a neighborly gesture. The working students liked this rule.





RIDING LESSON

The communication between rider and horse is surely a key to success in any discipline of competition. There are many aids which allow this conversation, with probably one of the most useful being the half-halt. The half-halt, originally credited to the French method, is greatly overcomplicated in the vast majority of manuals to the point that it is now rarely taught at all. In reality, it is easy to use and extremely clear to the horse.

A half-halt is simply a momentary tug on the rein, lasting no longer than one stride. It can be given with both hands simultaneously (as per the German school) or by the outside hand only (as per the French school). The more important information that makes the half-halt effective for various purposes is that it is directed at a hind leg which is firmly on the ground. This is much easier to calculate than it seems.

At the rising trot, having chosen the correct diagonal, the inside hind is on the ground each time the rider sits in the saddle. The inside hind leg is considered available to accept a half-halt at this moment. Similarly, at the canter, the inner hind is on the ground as the rider's seat goes forward. This is easy to find.

There are three challenges to giving an aid:

1. One must know the aid to be given—in this case, the half-halt.
2. One must know the moment in the movement to use the aid—that is, when the hind leg to be affected is on the ground.
3. One must choose the strength to use, which applies to the horse and the situation, when giving the aid.



A SHORT DISSERTATION ON THE HALF-HALT

The first two challenges are for the trainer to make clear. The third is for the rider, as this can change constantly. A half-halt given inappropriately in the direction of a hind leg which is not on the ground can cause a stumble or a spavin. The horse will rapidly learn to defend himself from this by stiffening his jaw and neck so as to block the rein effect. This stiffening is often misunderstood. It is easy to correct by careful riding for two weeks or so.

A half-halt can be used to make the horse put more weight on his hind leg than he normally does. A series of half-halts can change the balance of a horse from “on his shoulders” to “beautifully balanced” by putting more weight to the rear. There is no better way to improve freedom in the shoulder than to change the balance to the rear and then ask for a little acceleration.

A half-halt which places more weight on the hind leg causes the bending of the joints in the hind leg. The result of this lowering of the hocks and hips is more spring. Years ago, I was told to “put my horse on his hocks” in order to get more jump. It is the same concept, but more accurately taught to the horse and the rider.

A series of half-halts is a useful way to slow down the horse without killing the motor, as the rein only affects one of the hind legs, leaving the other free. A series of half-halts can alert the horse to an upcoming effort and, at the same time, prepare the hind leg that will function, such as in a flying change or in a transition from canter to walk. One half-halt can refresh the mouth which is becoming dull, refocus the horse that is losing attention, or quickly rebalance a horse that is too low.



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The proof of a half-halt having been accepted by the hind leg is in what the horse is capable of doing in the next stride. Once a rider has discovered this, he will never underestimate the value of the half-halt.

Riders and trainers who have never really understood the half-halt do not teach it. Although this is understandable, it is a very serious and contagious lack in the modern schools. The overcomplicated explanations offered in the majority of manuals on the subject have led to discouragement instead of progress. In reality, the half-halt is simpler than one thinks, and with practice, can become of great use to the rider and his horse.