

October Symposium at Maplewood Warmbloods

On the heels of the recently released statement by Princess Haya, President of the FEI, Jen Vanover, myself (Margaret K. Boyce) and Ron Postleb are very proud that we took the potentially unpopular steps to host what was deemed a historical event. The 2008 International Dressage Symposium titled "Competitive Dressage vs Classical Dressage" was held on Oct 17-19, 2008 at Maplewood Warmbloods LLC in Middletown, New York, USA. The clinicians were: Klaus Balkenhol (Olympic Multi-Gold Medalist, former coach of both the German and US teams), Dr. Gerd Heuschmann (world renown veterinarian), and Colonel Christian Carde (FEI "I" Judge, Former Head Trainer of Saumur and President of Allege Ideal).

Jen and I met in November of 2007 and quickly found a common thread . We worried about the future of competition dressage with all the current bad trends and negative developments . As certified coach and Dressage judge, I had been out of the competition/judging scene for quite some time but when I went to back to competing locally and also on a horse shopping trip in Florida, it was such an eye opener with a lot of incorrect training. Jen, a successful rider and breeder of Dutch and Oldenburg horses also took the same stance - " I never want any of my babies (her horses) to be trained in such a manner. We're breeding for temperament and movement then allowing them to be trained and judged where their physical and mental health is not the main concern." In May of 2008 Jen and myself joined long-time friend and colleague Ron Postleb (Reitlehrer FN out of Brewster, NY) formed a plan to put on a international dressage symposium that attacked the very issues they opposed .

It was a natural selection to choose these three men as our speakers - they were bonded to each other with out really knowing it. Klaus and Gerd (both German) had already lectured several times together in the USA . I discovered that Gerd was an honorary member of Allege - Ideal (Carde's dressage association) so the connection was made and the right elements came together. For years I've had this dream of having a two classically trained dressage masters - a German and a Frenchman come together to speak about their similar approaches in training practices in order to attack the method of Rolkur. Jen had already been speaking to Judith Balkenhol about having Klaus come to Maplewood , and when Jen brought up the idea of having Carde (an FEI I Judge) be a part of the event, Judith and Klaus received it with great enthusiasm. Ron functioned master of ceremonies at the event as well as a translator for Klaus for which he did an extremely competent job.

Many top International figures were on hand to help with Maplewood's cause. Former Olympian and president of The Dressage Foundation as well as Founder for Dressage4Kids, Lendon Gray, received the idea whole-heartedly. and sent two of her students as demo riders: Annie Morris and Mica Mabragana, Lendon's current star performer. Both girls did a wonderful job and Mica wowed the crowd (and most certainly Carde) with her lovely position and elegant riding and Carde congratulated Lendon on having developed such a rider .

What was most wonderful was that so many people came from all over the world because

they believe as we do at Maplewood that international judging has clearly lost its classical roots. Classical dressage supporters flew in from all over the world: Australia, Germany, France, Canada, and from the USA -Texas, California, Maryland, Vermont, and Maine and braved the chilly October weather. What surprised Lendon, one of the USA's top dressage coaches (who took pages of notes through out the event) was the lack of attendance of trainers and judges. " It was such a boost to me to listen to three trainers who each have such a convincing approach to a thoughtful system of riding and training. As is often the case I was saddened to see so few trainers and judges. First of all where do they get their ongoing education if not from such a symposium. And secondly for the sake of our students and especially of our horses, I wish more professionals had been there to be convinced to try harder to use truly classical principals in their training and for their judging eye."

Friday prior to the symposium was a private teaching day for both Klaus and Carde . Many riders who participated in the clinic day graciously stayed through the weekend to act as demo riders for Klaus and Carde when asked. Top International trainers quickly followed Lendon's lead to support Maplewood. Former Olympian Cesar Parra brought two horses (Florence & Whoopie Gold) and his student Kevin Kohmann . 2008 USA Dressage Team member Courtney King -Dye also embraced the cause and came for Sunday's demonstrations. Courtney rode Kim Boyer's FEI Andulsion Grandioso II and her working student Jen Marchand both acted also as a demo rider for Klaus . Clair Glover on her two lovely mares demonstrated for both Klaus and Carde since she has the ability to demonstrate clearly two different approaches to classical dressage. Lena Hildman on her lovely 3 yr old Davidoff rode both days as well as Elizabeth Niemi on Kosmo who agreed to be Gerd's famous painted muscle horse for his lecture on Sunday .Kim Walnes (winner of the 1988 Rolex 3-day event) did a wonderful job demonstrating for Carde as did Sue Mimms . Maplewood thanks all the demo riders for doing such a wonderful job.

God was favorable regarding the weather as the symposium was outside in order to encompass the large screen for all the viewers. Gerd started the event with a brilliant, passionate lecture restating all he says in his book " Tug of War : Classical versus Modern Dressage". Before he started his lecture, he caught the audience's attention by his opening statement that : that all riders (professional or amateur) must constantly work through their entire life towards developing and maintaining a correct seat. He then reviewed all his scientific evidence regarding the negative effects of using draw reins and Roll-kur and warned the crowd often not to rush a young horse into competition . He constantly emphasized that riders must not shorten a horse's neck, but ride the neck long and send the horse to the bit with the nose in front of the vertical . Through a very effective power point presentation, he showed current "stars" of international dressage performing irregular, bad postured dressage movements. He showed multiple examples of the "show trot" where the diagonal pair of legs do not match in angle hence a slow, unengaged hind legs and back. Gerd then went on to discuss how he explored different cultures approaches to dressage training and then clearly describe how he learned a classical dressage technique (a French exercise that Carde often teaches) and how he felt very positive results with the horse " the back of the horse came up and the horse move under my weight . "This was a great place to end Gerd's lecture as Carde was next on the bill .

The audience then broke and reassembled for Carde's lecture on the current FEI rules. Unfortunately his power point presentation was incomplete due to technical problems but that did not lose his message. Carde repeated a similar theme as Gerd - we must adhere to the current FEI rules but many FEI judges do not observe them. By rewarding performances where anxious horses have: over bent frames; low poll and tense irregular gaits (due to incorrectly functioning muscles) . This is not only unhealthy horse the horse, it is against FEI rules. Carde's opinions as a FEI "I" Dressage Judge has lost it popularity since he does not agree with direction the FEI has taken regarding Roll-kur. As a result of the FEI marginally accepting the "hand riding " style of Roll-kur under the euphemism of " Hyperflexion " it is allowing in the warm up area and it has been further accepted as a valid training technique. Now it is the horror show we see often in the warm up rings today (Goog le Roll-kur) and you will understand why these three men united in order to speak against its practice.

Jen, Ron and I could not have planned it better. Gerd's lecture set up exactly what Carde then followed through in his presentation from the perspective of an FEI Judge. He reminded us that dressage is a partnership and then quoted passages from the FEI rulebook that do not describe competition dressage as we see it today. Carde is greatly concerned that the first descriptive word in the FEI rule book for a dressage horse is " calm " , but current competition horses at the highest competitive level are so tense they piaffe through the halt and offer strong disobediences . The chemistry between Gerd and Carde was undeniable. Gerd came to me during the first day of the symposium, kissed me on the forehead and said " I love your Colonel ". Gerd and Carde have already done a lecture together (Nov/08) in Italy since this symposium and I am sure there will be many more collaborations in the future.

After lunch, Klaus then took the floor with his focused teaching style and Gerd discussed the horse's bio mechanics from the side lines. Gerd and Klaus explained how relaxation and stretching in the warm up play a vital role in developing the horse's muscles correctly, hence good dressage training. Lena Hildmann on her 3 yr old Davidoff and Kevin Kohmann on Whoopi Gold showed beautiful youngsters full of potential . Davidoff showed a good development of relaxation and trust for a 3 yr old while the 4 yr old Whoopi Gold worried about the crowd and big screen. Klaus's advice to both riders was to be patient, " Do rising trot, give the reins and lengthen the neck." His main focus was on getting the horse more confident and relaxed in the basic work by having the riders lowering the horse's frame into a stretching circle . By Klaus demanding a classically correct warm up, both horses improved in their gaits and their mental tension resolved as well which was noted to the audience. Carde and Gerd discussed how the quality of the gaits of both horses improved overall when they became more relaxed.

Now if we dared ask a few chosen international Grand Prix stars to do a stretching circle in the middle of their GP test (as Klaus requested of these young horses to do) how many could do it correctly ? If a GP horse is truly relaxed and supple (as the FEI states a GP horse should be) the stretching circle should be a relatively easy exercise to obtain compared to a piaffe, but this is often not the case . A good quality stretching circle

requires true relaxation of the horse's mind, then his muscles have a chance to follow the lowering hand into the stretch . It also requires the horse to swing its lower back , but if the horse has been ridden excessively with the hand, it will not have the confidence to follow the hand with sufficient relaxation to maintain its balance and rhythm . Bottom line - Rollkur exercises (chin to chest) does raises the upper back muscles by the wither but far too excessively which strains these muscles. What is worse is " chin to chest " exercises severely drops the lower back muscles (close to the hind quarters) potentially developing a " kissing spine " scenario.

These important basic concepts: trust and relaxation are where these three great teachers stand so closely together. They believe that these elements as well as over bent frames, low polls and dropped backs are not being taken enough into consideration by international judges - as a result the controversial placings at the Beijing Olympics. Both Carde and Klaus believe the elements that produce trust and confidence are essential to maintain in the continued partnership of the horse and rider as they proceeds from basics work to Grand Prix. This require the rider to be constantly thinking about the horse's emotionally state of mind and how the rider must regulate the training to that element. If the horse is tense, it must first be relaxed correctly in order to get the muscles and skeleton to function properly. Gerd discussed how he has so many horses come to his clinic all as a result of stress related injuries - the mind is stressed, the horse has been over controlled by the hand and the horse suffers irreparable damage.

Next on the agenda was Carde's different educational approach on how he gains a horse's trust. Carde reinforced Klaus's message with his very academic exercises straight from the pages of De Carpentry - Academic Education. His work in hand presentation brought the word " partnership " to life. Through a very convincing demonstrating Carde showed a "joining up " of himself and his demo horse, Otto owned by Kristy Niblo, one of MWW's boarders. This wonderful horse had no fear of the crowd and was fully attentive to his every move. Carde said " you must have the full cooperation of the horse during in hand work (not to be confused with lunging work) where the horse could easily hurt the handler - or your work will just be circus ." With his whip which he constantly stressed should only be only used for indication, not discipline, he went on to perform in hand exercises that loosened the horse's whole body - selection by selection. He explained that is far easier for the horse to learn and use its body with out the rider's weight and the handler can give much more accurate aids to the horse . It was then that Klaus stated for the whole crowd to hear " I have never seen this type of work before. Thank you Colonel, I have learned something today " .

Carde's approach is very calm but he is very passionate about what he does. I consider him the " guardian of the horse's frame " as he will not proceed forward until he literally unlocks the horse's front end by applying stretching work which relaxes the horse. I can compare it to my own physical training as an athlete, it is like a yoga class, focusing on changing the horse's stretching postures in a relaxed, flowing manner. While these exercise are performed, he maintains the classical principles of keeping the nose in front of the vertical ." Permanent, elastic contact " is Carde's mantra - he stresses to his riders that the horse should always follow the rider's soft, light hand every where the rider puts the

horse's frame .Carde then rode Clair Glover's mare Sweety and demonstrated clearly how stretching the mare's neck in an upward frame in the walk (only for a few seconds at a time) and then immediately lowering the frame to the ground relaxed Sweety's muscles and mind. The mare became far more opened in her throat latch and longer in her stride. I recently read a email from Clair about what she got out of her Carde lessons - she replied in one word " lightness " . That is Carde's focus - riding with light, soft aids in order to lighten the forehand of the horse.

At the Saturday night Gala dinner that evening, many congratulations were given to Jen for being such a wonderful host and for being so brave to fund such an amazing event. Many thanks were also given to her fiance, Tommy Pushkal who also worked endlessly to assemble the MWW grounds for the symposium. He literally moved mountains creating the parking lot and leveling and installing the massive outdoor ring. Jen's parents were also on hand from Michigan to help. It was so emotional for me that night . Wiping away tears , I said " I had formed this plan so many years ago to have a Frenchman and a German come together in order to save the sport from ruin . It was only when I arrived on the fertile soil of Maplewood Warmbloods that the seed could grow " .

The next morning, the symposium's schedule started with Carde's lecture of the " History of Competition Dressage " where he discussed the different visual look of dressage horses 30 years ago and now. Here he stated that horses competing today that perform with the nose in front of the vertical and poll the highest point are often being judged incorrectly as being " above the bit " . This is a result of many judge's eyes growing far too accustomed to low, over bent frames . Carde also stated that many judges they do not recognize " a well trained horse " because of their own lack of classical education as a rider .

This lecture was then followed by the three man podium discussion where the audience had a chance to ask questions. During this discussion I asked the panel why the FEI changed their definition from " Grand Prix dressage is a competition of artistic equitation " to " Grand Prix dressage is a competition at the highest level " and why the FEI removed the word " calm" from the descriptive term of a dressage horse at one point only to have organization such as Carde's Allege - Ideal force it back in . Klaus answer this question very enthusiastically stating by having people in power that know little about training horse classically has allowed the sport to develop where it is now - horses being used as a business tool and a means to an end. I then asked how could we change things and Gerd reply he is making " anti Rolkur T Shirts " and requested the audience to buy and where they to events such as the World Cup to guilt the competitors into not using such training methods.

Then on to Carde's demonstrations, this time using my own young horse, Bigello a 3 year Hanoverian gelding. Bigello immediately connected with Carde during their in hand session being totally relaxed and attentive to him. Carde used the horse's youthful willingness to his teaching advantage by engaging Bigello with the whip. As Carde was getting Bigello accustomed to the whip, the horse thought this a game wanting to play tug of war. Carde in a very relaxed manner allowed Bigello to explore the whip and then gave him the whip and the gelding playfully walked around with it in this mouth. Carde

affectionately called Big " the little conductor who is going to teach me " . Carde then went on to show how to you teach a young horse to do laterally flex in the jaw on the ground . This demonstration showed the importance in hand work and how you can avoid developing resistances with the horse if you work each individual section of the horse's body in hand . Carde asked Bigello to flex in his jaw and the horse showed obvious resistant at the first few attempts , but by the third attempt ,the horse understood and relaxed into the exercise. Carde then said " this is why it is so important to do in hand work because think how hard this would be to teach the horse if the rider was on the horse's back. "

You could not but be won over by Carde - he truly showed that he loves horses. If you read Klaus's book -" Klaus Balkenhol -The Man and his Training Method " he often speaks about how he thinks of his horses as his children . Both men believe that horses should receive the same level of respect and care in their early education as children do. Klaus gave this statement on day one : "With young horses, trainers must always have lots and lots of time in their pocket. You must give the horse whatever time it needs in order to relax and understand what is expected of them." All men agreed that if the rider rushes the process of developing relaxation and trust in the horse, they will only develop distrust and nervousness in the rider, similar to the situation of an ambitious parent that pushes a child too hard in their education or sport - a nervous, resistant child will develop. Carde also spoke of how many competition horses show bad " childhood memories " in the ring .

Carde then continued on with the riding portion of his demonstration with Kim Walnes on her lovely Connemara Stallion. Clearly you don't need a tight nose band to form a good connection with your horse's mouth because Kim rode her stallion with out one! This was one of Carde's biggest "pet peeves" - tight nose bands that are trying to hide problems that hand riding has developed and Klaus was in complete agreement. It was refreshing to see that all horses that came into the demo ring both days had to go through a nose band check before proceeding with their work. Kim demonstrated a beautiful connection to the bit with relaxed, correct work which was the essence of the symposium message - develop a relaxed correctly trained horse with regular gaits and you should win over a tense horse that shows incorrect training with irregular but brilliant gaits. Nose bands are now allowed to be tighten excessively in order hide busy mouths of an anxious animal competitors with contact issues . I have read somewhere about a horse developing severe bruising and abscesses of the jaw bone because so much constant pressure on that area. We often see excessive padding around nose band in order to " ethically " cranked the nose band even more to keep the horse's mouth shut and the tongue in. Some trainers justify this practice by saying that it helps encourage a good contact with the horse's mouth - these men say that it is to hide nervous chewing which produces an excessive amount of mouth foam and a snaky tongue because of anxiety.

After lunch, Klaus and Gerd took front stage again with Elizabeth Niemi riding Kosmo as the painted horse demonstrating the horse's muscle and bones and their function during correct and incorrect work . Klaus request Elizabeth to ride Kosmo in different frame lengthens which gave the audience a clear picture of a long neck versus the short neck training style and how that affected the rest of the horse's body. When the cervical spine

(the neck bone) formed an "s" by being rolled too tight (nose to chest) Kosmo's lower back dropped and his hind legs were more out behind. When Kosmos lowered his frame and/or stretched his neck long , the back clearly lifted up and his hind quarters step more under his center of gravity with increased engagement . After this super visual demonstration, Klaus turned his full attention to Courtney Dye King on Grandioso II and her working student Jen Marchand . It was paradoxical that Courtney was at this event and that occurred to me as Courtney was riding. Klaus spoke in her defense regarding how the FEI panel wrongfully found her guilty of administering drugs ,such an insignificant amount that it could not even affect a mouse ! What came to my mind is how the FEI stuck to that rule but many FEI Judges do to not follow the FEI rulebook against obviously overbent, tense, and irregular performances. Scan the current FEI web pages and you will find photos of international horses ones that Gerd used in this presentation) clearly showing incorrect postures during their event wins - proving the theory of how we live in such interesting and political times !

It is timely that Princess Haya and the FEI Executive Committee have concluded that the current state of the affairs of international dressage must be reformed. Jen decided long ago that this October 2008 symposium was to be the first of an " International Dressage Reformation Series " at Maplewood Warmbloods . This series will be continued for the next four years after every competition season . Top international speakers will address the heated topics about training and judging in hopes that after the next Olympics a difference has been made towards reestablishing classical principles in the international competition arena. " Ignorance is no longer an excuse." Jen stated . " True trainers must continue to learn and implement and we at Maplewood hope this series will be a tool for the young and old trainer and judge. But Maplewood also hopes that this series will protect and develop the sport of dressage, the ultimate aim of which to improve the quality of life for a ll horse in the sport " .

In conclusion, Jen , myself and Ron would like to personally thank all the wonderful sponsors for this event: Ecogold - who donated saddle pads to our demo riders; Congelosis Trailers ; Purina Feeds; Dutchess Bridle and Saddlery and Travel Right Footing. Please continue to support these kind of events by returning to Maplewood next year for our 2009 Fall symposium . To all of you , please help to spread these speaker's messages by purchasing Dr. Heuschmann DVD " If Horse Could Speak " Go the www.MaplewoodWarmbloods.com website for details - please note that the DVD of the Oct /08 symposium will be on sale very soon.

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