

GLOBAL DRESSAGE FORUM 2001

Forum 2001: United Nations in dressage

The first Global Dressage Forum, in September 2001, turned out to be a big success. Dressage Today, the American magazine, described the Forum as follows: " Like a United Nations Assembly bringing people together from around the globe, more than 300 riders, trainers and spectators from 25 countries arrived at the first Forum in the Netherlands. Their mission was to examine the success of the world's most renowned riders and trainers, and from that, begin to create a universal dressage language. "No one questions classical principles," stated Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) World Cup Dressage Director Joep Bartels in his opening speech, "but they are sometimes used to hide behind to avoid an open discussion."

There were many questions and discussions on the different styles and different techniques seen over the two days in 2001. As many visitors said: 'We have seen the best of the best and looked behind the curtains of the top combination.' While agreement on technique was not universal, it was agreed that the paramount important must be the welfare of the horse. Only a happy horse will be happy to give to the rider and only such a partnership will be nice to watch. International judge Stephen Clarke summarised: ' Training is up to the individual. We have seen different methods but all with beautiful end results. Elasticity, impulsion, brilliance, engagement, horses who have these qualities gain the highest marks.'

Report 2001:

For those, who have not been present at the occasion of the first Global Dressage Forum in September 2001, we are publishing some parts of an article by Stacey Nedrow-Wigmore, with permission of Dressage Today 2001.

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Their mission is to examine the success of the world's most renowned riders and trainers, and from that, begin to create a universal dressage language. "No one questions classical principles," says Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) World Cup Dressage Director Joep Bartels. "But they are sometimes used to hide behind to avoid an open discussion." One of the Academy's main points, states literature handed out at the forum, is the "unification of equestrian terminology in education." Over the next two days, six of the world's top trainers give individual theoretical overviews, lasting anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, on a wide range of dressage topics. After each overview, curtains behind a mobile stage part, revealing riders warming up their mounts in the arena. The trainers then oversee hour-long practical clinics, demonstrating how their comments translate into actual practice. In an effort to set standard dressage terminology, at the beginning and end of each day as well as throughout intermissions, definitions from the U.S. Dressage Federation's Glossary of Dressage Judging Terms as well as some German dressage vocabulary flash on a retractable movie screen, suspended from the ceiling joists in front of the tiered seating area that leads to the arena. In a booklet listing definitions, Tineke Bartels says that a systematic training system is useful not only for the improvement of riding but also for the communication of the equestrian world. "Wouldn't it be good to use the same terminology and basic elements for the instruction?" she queries.

Jürgen Koschel: Work in Hand

"Work in-hand is a bit forgotten, but it is carried on at the Spanish Riding School, the Cadre Noir and the Royal Andalusian Riding School in Jerez, Spain," says Jürgen Koschel, the Dutch national trainer and former national trainer of Finland and Spain, as he begins to give his demonstration on training horses to piaffe and passage in-hand. Koschel emphasizes that all work-whether in-hand or ridden-always starts with basic gaits and a clear rhythm. "Once the horse is in rhythm, he can begin to relax. Once he relaxes, he can begin to take contact. With contact begins impulsion. A horse can only be straight if he has impulsion, and with straightness comes collection." In other words, collection happens-a concept that is repeated throughout the forum. Key points that are observed by the technical committee at Koschel's presentation are willingness and confidence: The horse never questioned the handler and had confidence in his balance and in the handler's control. They agree that Koschel's training style was that of sympathetic control-the approach of the trainer made it possible to get confidence from the horse.

Sjef Janssen: Training Deep and Round

As he takes his seat on the stage, Sjef Janssen humorously greets the audience with, "Good morning inquisition." His topic-the most controversial of the forum-is the often-discussed and much-debated deep-and-round method of riding seen in the warm-up arenas by many of the top European riders including Nicole Uphoff, Isabell Werth and Anky van Grunsven. After more than an hour of explanation by physiotherapist Solange Schrijer, the Academy staff parts the curtains again to reveal van Grunsven riding her Olympic and World Championship partner, Gestion Bonfire. Though now retired, the 18-year-old Oldenburg gelding looks as if he can do another top competition tomorrow. Janssen comments that Bonfire still has the energy of a 4-year-old. Janssen and van Grunsven's program for Bonfire includes a slow, three-to-four minute warm-up with no impulsion to stretch the muscles. They begin with small transitions within the trot and the canter. Van Grunsven tests Bonfire a few times with her leg aids to make sure he's paying attention, then she brings him into a deeper frame while continuing the transitions between gaits to get a good reaction from his hind legs. This frame isn't about pulling his head down and in, though-Bonfire is relaxed and very round throughout his entire body with his hind legs engaged and his back up. Janssen says, "Playing with transitions is playing with the horse's reflexes." This is getting the horse in front of the leg. "The horse must think forward," he says. However, he warns that if the horse gets too fast or rushes, the rider needs to go back to a slow trot with no impulsion as in the warm-up to stretch the muscles. The success of this technique comes from doing hundreds of exercises to keep the horse concentrating and so he's not locked into the same position for any length of time. "Use all the possibilities you have in your training," Janssen says. "It's boring to do the same movements all the time. Absorb what you see other riders doing in the warm-up arena, and combine everything you see in the exercises. There are endless possibilities." To show how van Grunsven gets her horses ready for a show, she begins demonstrating the training techniques she and Janssen use in the three weeks prior to a competition. This includes working more on the lines that appear in the tests so the horse recognizes them when they come up. Janssen says that it's easy to bring the horse's frame back up again for competition. If you always vary the frame in training, you can ask the horse to go however you want him to at any time. "Total control in every situation is the goal," he says. "Play with the mind, and

play with the body. It should be pleasant for the horse, the rider and the spectator." The technical committee sums up Janssen's presentation with the words variation, ultimate adjustability, attention to detail and secure partnership. At this point, discussion on terminology ensues. Throughout the demonstration, Janssen had referred to his deep-and-round technique as a "system." Hinnemann disagrees: "There are only two systems, wrong and right riding." So the group agrees that the word "technique" is the more acceptable term. The clarification highlights the fact that despite the nuances of different training methods, the training scale is the same no matter who is teaching. This insight grounds the group for the rest of the demonstrations. Audience members pose the most questions at the conclusion of this demonstration. One question on many minds was: "Sjef and Anky have proven their technique, but what do you say to the thousands of students who are just pulling their horses' heads down?" Janssen answers simply, "They have misunderstood this way of training. That's one of the dangers of it. They need to immerse themselves in it and have the right instructor." After the forum, FEI "O" judge Axel Steiner further clarifies: "Deep and round is only one way of training. It has to be done selectively by top trainers, and it doesn't work for every horse."

Kyra Kyrklund: Training Juniors and Young Riders

"It takes 100,000 repetitions before things become automatic and 5,000 times to break an old system," says five-time Olympian Kyra Kyrklund as she demonstrates her training techniques with Junior rider Dominique Filion riding Goubergh's Montreal and Young Rider Annemiek van der Vorm riding Agrovorm's Incredible. Kyrklund recommends that "trainers should educate Juniors and Young Riders to the traditional way of riding to get more control over the horse." She emphasizes that by "control" she means "positive control" in that the horse needs to give in to the rider much like a dog rolls over and is submissive to its owner. She says it's the responsibility of the trainer to define borders for the young students about what can and cannot be done with horses. Kyrklund notices that both horses are pulling their riders out of the saddle. "Riders must be strong in the stomach. The horses should not be able to pull the rider out of the saddle. If a horse feels he can change you, he will change you." With the two horses halted in the middle of the arena, Kyrklund stands in front of each horse, grasps the snaffle reins and leans all her weight against the rider's hands. In this way, she teaches the riders how to use their stomach muscles to stay in the saddle. "A grounded seat equals a balanced seat," she says. As the riders make their way out to the rail once again, Kyrklund asks the long-legged Filion to shorten her stirrups one hole and explains, "Riders must have angle in their knee in order to use their leg aids," she tells us. "Don't look for balance in the knee instead of in your seat bones. Keep your heel under your seat bone, and feel that the knee stays in front of the rest of the body." The riders begin playing with shortening the steps at the trot by slowing with the reins while continuing to trot. "The half halt is the essence of dressage. It is the ultimate control of the steps of the horse. It is for balancing and rebalancing the horse," reminds Kyrklund. "A horse carries 70 percent of his weight on his front end. The purpose of training is to get the horse to start carrying more weight on the hind leg. He can carry more weight when his hind leg is underneath him, and the more he uses the hind leg, the more energy he puts into lifting himself." Van der Vorm's horse doesn't want to trot in short steps, so Kyrklund tells her, "Don't ride with the hand brake on all the time. Release and say, 'OK, that's what I wanted.'" She cautions, "The rider must sit quietly and not do too much while the horse is taking small steps." The riders perform walk-halt-walk-trot transitions in travers on centerline with the front legs on the centerline and the horses looking in the direction they're going with level ears. The benefits of this exercise are several: The transitions on centerline help control the length of the step and the length of the horse's neck, and the actual work on

centerline shows the rider how much or how little control she really has without a wall for support. Kyrklund adds that a correctly ridden shoulder-in can be used instead of the travers in this exercise; however, she points out, "Most riders cannot do a correct shoulder-in." The technical committee's key words for Kyrklund's presentation are balance and control for the rider, rider responsibility and using weight distribution to improve the balance of horse to achieve self-carriage. At the end of the day, spectators dine on a hot buffet, after which Joep Bartels and the technical committee conclude with a summary of the three presentations and answer more questions. Though it's nearly 10 p.m., spectators enjoy wandering through the barns, which include a breeding shed and laboratory. Then the group heads home to prepare for the next day's sessions.

Eric Lette: Training the Trot

"Dressage is comfortable and controlled transportation," says Lette, current advisor to the Swedish dressage team, standing on a stage set up in front of the audience at the start of his session on training the trot. The simplicity of the statement sets the tone for the rest of his demonstration. Balancing his role as both a trainer and a judge, he says riders must keep the goals of the sport in mind as they train: to achieve success in the sport while maintaining the traditions of the art. He emphasizes the need for riders and trainers to follow the guidelines set forth in the FEI Rule Book in their training. "If we don't teach with a system, the horses will never learn," he says. Lette refers to the training scale as the basis for his presentation: "We talk a lot about details, but it's important to think about the system. Once we know this, then we can think about different techniques or methods." He cautions riders not to "behave like Alice in Wonderland. Everything was easy for her, and she was always looking to do things in a more difficult way." He recommends keeping the training process simple. Next is a review of the three aids: legs to go forward, seat and reins for braking and turning. "Very often a horse doesn't work because he's not listening or understanding the aids," he says. "In our warming up everyday, we need to check the basics: Is the horse listening, going forward, respecting and taking the aids of the rider, etc. If those basics aren't there, nothing happens when we need it to." American Christine Traurig and her Olympic partner, Etienne, appear as the hunter green curtain panels behind the speaker's stage are drawn back to reveal the arena. The newly reunited pair look as if they haven't lost any time as they demonstrate trot-halt transitions to build engagement and to get the reaction of having the hind legs stop the forward motion. Traurig is successful in her mission by asking Etienne to go more forward in the trot before the transition. Lette turns to the audience and asks what seems to be a simple question: "How much should the horse be bent in the half pass?" There is some murmuring in the gallery, but no concrete answers. "Is it in the rules?" he challenges. Then he offers, "The rules don't say exactly." To clarify, he says there should be more bend the steeper the half pass. "Therefore, there is more bend seen in a half pass in a Grand Prix test than there is in a Prix St. Georges test." His prescription for success in the half pass is starting with just a little bend and then asking for more. "The rider must think and ride forward and not concentrate so much on moving sideways, and the horse must stay collected to stay in balance." Lette discusses piaffe and passage. "The horse must be able to go from collected trot to very collected trot," he says, adding that a horse will do passage on his own if the rider has the horse controlled, however, the piaffe must be trained. Dutch Olympian Coby van Baalen enters the arena riding the 9-year-old Oldenburg Welt Hit II. Watching the horse warm up, Lette engages the audience. "Is the training correct?" Again, there is a moment of silence. "That's a tricky question. Most things can always be better. It shouldn't be black and white. It doesn't mean that if the

movement isn't a 10, it is less than a 5." He explains that to improve the trot, the rider must begin to focus on the details. However, it's the quality of the trot that is most important and must be developed. "Always ask yourself, 'How can I improve this movement?' If you want to improve, you need to look at the big picture and not get caught up in the details." Welt Hit II is slow with his hind legs so Lette asks van Baalen do trot-halt transitions. He explains that a horse's engine is in the back, and it must both carry weight and push forward. "Different movements are different combinations of push and carry."

As they did at the conclusion of each presentation on the first day, a technical committee sums up the key points of the discussion. The key words for Lette's demonstration and training style include majestic, expression, simplicity, basics and foundation.

Rafaël Soto: Training Andalusians

"You must train the rider. The horse will show you what is correct," says Spanish Olympian Rafaël Soto. He was speaking particularly of the Andalusian horses, whom Soto and his Spanish teammates have ridden in top competitions since 1994, though his statement applies to any breed. While the Andalusian breed was prevalent in classical dressage training throughout history, the current dressage tests were written with the present-day warmblood in mind. Because of this, Soto and his colleagues at the Royal Andalusian Riding School in Jerez, Spain, have a unique set of limitations, such as short necks and bodies, that they must overcome in their training. However, this is becoming less of a problem as the modern breeding programs are producing a sporthorse type of Andalusian that can compete more equally with warmbloods. Soto attributes much of Andalusians' ability to their good minds. "They're willing to do anything. If you want to see their quality, a lot of it is inside." Soto is candid during his demonstrations about training. "Trying to round too quickly is a problem with these horses," he points out as the rider on an 8-year-old horse begins his warm-up. Soto instructs him to do half pass at the walk while focusing on not letting the horse get behind the vertical. "It's too easy to get the horse behind the bit, and when that happens, his hind legs stop working," says Soto. For this reason, he points out that, unlike more fiery horses such as Bonfire, Andalusians can't be worked in a round-and-deep frame, "otherwise these horses have no movement behind." The rider must always work on increasing the activity of the horse's hind legs to teach him to push more while coming over the back and neck. "Only with this work can you get to Grand Prix," confirms Soto. The exercise he suggests often is shoulder-in in the downward transitions to help bring the horse's hind legs under and to get more control. The technical committee's key words and phrases include honesty about weak points-not trying to hide anything. They also note Soto's pride in the horses and feeling that horses have spirits and are not machines. They describe Soto's teaching style as practical, common sense, modest and natural.

Johann Hinnemann: Improving the Collected Canter

"Next to the walk on the bit, collected canter is the most difficult exercise in riding and competing," says German trainer Johann Hinnemann prefacing his discussion on improving the collected canter. Hinnemann says the German Federation states that the collected canter must be clear with three beats and a moment of suspension. It must jump with an uphill tendency with the horse's legs under the center of gravity. He outlines the common problems seen in the collected canter: a rhythm that's too sluggish or slow, insufficient balance and/or an irregular (four-beat) footfall. He adds that the clarity of the collected canter can be endangered by practicing it too early, particularly with a horse with a big canter and lack of suppleness. Lack of throughness, caused by the strides being too short

and/or too fast, the rider using the wrong aids or a horse being weak, also affects the canter's clarity. "We must talk about the rider when discussing the improvement of dressage. You can't get a lively, jumping canter using too-strong hands. It directly affects the hind legs and causes a loss of self-carriage and problems with impulsion." He adds, "A restless seat and/or aids of the rider causes weakness in the collected canter: If the rider's upper body is too active, it interferes with the back muscles, which interferes with the suppleness. Practicing collected canter too long causes a loss of impulsion because the horse gets tired. A rider cannot correct this within the collected canter. She must take a walk break, go back to the canter and collect the horse through half halts, not pulling." Coby van Baalen's daughter, Marlies, appears as the curtain is once again opened, riding Roman Nature, a 7-year-old Westphalian stallion and previous winner of the 5-year-old class at the World Breeding Championships. After a warm-up of long-and-low work, in which van Baalen stretches the horse out and down toward the bit to improve his suppleness, she begins doing canter-walk transitions on the centerline to bring his hind legs under him and to increase the collection. These transitions are difficult for the horses to learn and for the riders to do, Hinnemann says, because the horse must be absolutely straight. Van Baalen asks Roman Nature to become more collected through exercises involving many transitions, between the gaits and also within them. She asks for an extended canter across the diagonal, collects for a few strides and then halts before the corner. She then begins riding simple changes. "The first stride into the canter must be powerful," Hinnemann says as van Baalen begins flying changes. To help her, Hinnemann says: "Sit to the right to change right." Roman Nature gets a little naughty so Hinnemann has her go back to simple changes to regain the horse's attention. "He was waiting to do fours, threes and twos," he says. "Don't punish him. He was bored and waiting for a new exercise." Van Baalen brings out a second horse known to many Americans-Idocus, a Dutch Warmblood stallion bred in the United States and trained by Olympian Lendon Gray and Young Rider Courtney King. After warming up in a long-and-low frame, van Baalen begins spiraling in and out on a circle to test if Idocus is using his inside leg as his pushing leg. Van Baalen begins collected canter on a 20-meter circle and at the second quarterline, collects the canter as if she were going to do a pirouette, but then she asks Idocus to go forward once again. "With this preparation, you can get nearly perfect pirouettes," says Hinnemann. Van Baalen positions Idocus in a shoulder-in, canters into the pirouette in the same rhythm. She starts the turn using her inside rein-without pulling back-and supporting outside leg while maintaining the canter with the inside leg. At the same time, she focuses on keeping her outside rein elevated, controlling the inside flexion, giving enough inside rein forward to allow Idocus to turn, while staying straight in her upper body with her weight over the inside seat bone. She performs six perfect strides and rides out in the same rhythm without overrotating the pirouette. "You must work with a long-term vision in mind," says Hinnemann. "For success to occur in the collected canter, the horse must be confirmed in the working trot and canter first. The hind legs must be closed up toward the front in a lively manner, then collection can happen." The technical committee sums up the key points of the last speaker as detailed and systematic. Hinnemann's teaching style is described as ultimately professional with a standard of knowledge and responsibility to those watching". (with permission of Dressage Today ©)