

Q: I see lots of Dressage riders, both beginners and pros—on horses that plod submissively along--- I guess they look “happy” in a bored sort of way. I think there must be something MORE. More like—an edgy quality--- like riding a horse whose expression might just look not quite in control- Your comments? D Neibling, Tucson, AZ

BILL: You’re quite right—there IS something more, and it’s what separates the “interesting” horses from the obedient, cheerful “coasters.” And I was with you right up to the horse’s expression looking “not quite in control.” Then we’re getting towards those flashy models with tail fins and a lot of chrome (that also throw their legs around and can’t stand still at the halt.)

A good rider takes chances and dares to ride the horse nearer “the edge,” but not so near that edge that the aura of harmony and a certain serenity are lost. Sometimes what’s crowd-pleasing because it’s flashy doesn’t (or SHOULDN’T) satisfy the judges if it goes over that line. Striking the best balance between energy/expression and calm confidence is the tactful rider’s art. That’s what we ought to be appreciating as spectators and rewarding as judges.