

What do you think about riders having the option of rising or sitting to the trot throughout First Level?

BILL – Well, it's a done deal with the new 2011 tests, so it doesn't much matter what I think. But just for the record, I don't think it's a very good idea. Understand, this is ground that has been gone over before. Whenever it comes to test writing, there's a tug of war among various factions who either adore or despise a particular movement and demand its inclusion/exclusion in the new requirements upon forecast of dire consequence. Likewise, there's a tension between those wanting to make the tests "horse friendlier" [read: *easier*] and those who want to protect "the art" from dilution and "dumbing down."

We heard all this back in the early '80s when the Strident Classicists held sway and insisted that even in Training Test 1 on a 4 year old off the racetrack, you had to enter and ride the centerline to X in *sitting* trot. "Because you can't do dressage if you can't sit, and if we don't *make* them sit, those people will never bother to learn." That's what we were told. More recently, when rising/sitting in Training Level became the rider's option, I thought it granted the riders some desirable leeway to decide what was most appropriate for each specific horse.

In the USEA (eventing) dressage tests, their Training Level is akin to an early USEF First Level test, and rising/sitting is optional. Again, a good idea because in eventing, the essence of the competition (sorry, purists) is the cross country. A horse's ability to run and jump is what usually determines at which level he's entered, and often those skills are ahead of his dressage.

But in real life (that would be US), someday we all have to face the music, and that means sitting to the trot. And I find myself echoing those nasty Germans. Not only must the riders be able to do it to go on, but the horses must accept it to work towards the goals of engagement and uphill balance.

What it comes down to is if you can't sit to your horse's trot, that why there are three Training Level tests. If you're getting bored with Training Level, well gosh darn, I guess you'd better just suck it up and figure out how to climb the next rung of the ladder.

So in the new First Level tests, rise if you must, but remember that cricket on your shoulder—let your conscience be your guide. And at least work towards being able to sit all the Working Trot.