

## Question of the Month?

### (Sorry, another interlude this month)

**BILL:** This is just a *minor* rant because I just don't want to get myself too wound up. And besides, it gets easy to sound both curmudgeonly and elitist at the same time if I'm not careful.

Years ago, when I was chair of the Instructor/Trainer Council, I was told that I could not say "Dressage is good for all horses, but not all horses are good for dressage." That seemed like a perfectly obvious statement meant to open the door to many disciplines to use our approach to riding while recognizing that horses which have been selectively bred for generations to compete in our sport are apt to be at a significant advantage when it comes to winning in the show ring. In the immediate post-Lowell Boomer era, that attitude was deemed politically incorrect and not in the best interests of a USDF trying to increase its membership.

In a few weeks I will judge a USDF recognized Morgan show, and in it I will judge, among other conventional dressage classes, something called Morgan Western Dressage. You heard me right. It's in the USEF rules in the Morgan division! When you look at the book, it appears that they've lifted the regular dressage rules verbatim and substituted a few phrases like "jog-trot" where it otherwise would say "working trot" and "lope" where our rules say "canter." Most all the other terminology remains the same, as are the tests the same as ours. There is a directive which warns that these are not to be "English horses going in Western tack" but that the intention is to preserve the style and way of going of the true Western horse.

None of this would bother me if it didn't pretend to be dressage and if it didn't have to be judged by a recognized dressage judge. Using gymnastic exercises to make a horse more pliable, supple, and obedient makes sense no matter what the end result is meant to be.

My problem comes when I have to SCORE it like dressage! A round circle is a round circle, of course, no matter what kind of tack you use. But when we evaluate dressage rides beyond the stages where survival and successful navigation are paramount, the qualities that separate the Exceptional from the Ordinary are things like cadence, engagement, expression, and buoyancy. The degree to which riders can infuse their performance with these ideas is what it's all about. As Col. Sommer once said, "Dressage without Impulsion is Circus."

I've gone to YouTube and looked at examples of Morgan Western Dressage and scored the rides by our normal standards. The kind of Collectives I saw were on the order of 5-5-7-6. Pleasant, obedient, but truly lifeless. I'd be the first to admit I have no eye for judging Western horses. Nor any training. Nor particularly any interest since their end goals aren't the same as what I've been working on learning and teaching for the last forty years.

How's it going to come out? I guess we'll know by mid month. I don't want to disappoint people. But I do have to be able to look myself in the eye (in the mirror) the day after this all shakes out.

I'll report back, promise!

#### POST SHOW UPDATE:

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, and sometimes it rains." (Annie Savoy speaking in *Bull Durham*) In this case, I won: there were no entries in Morgan western dressage at the Citrus Cup, which let me avoid the above stated conundrum altogether. In the "regular" Morgan dressage division, there were quite a few pleasant, respectable rides and some decent scores.