

A Master's Toolbox

Internationally renowned trainer Johann Hinnemann brings his wealth of knowledge to the Adequan®/USDF FEI-Level Trainers Conference

By Nancy Gorton

Photographs by Cheryl Erpelding

When the invitation to the 2018 Adequan®/USDF FEI-Level Trainers Conference came, my first thought was: I need to attend. My mentor, David Wightman (who was a demonstration rider at the conference), trains with the conference presenter, German master Johann Hinnemann, and has always spoken highly of Hinnemann's teaching methods.

The inevitable second thought—is it worth losing two days' pay to attend?—crept into my mind, so I queried David. He said yes, loud and clear, and boy, was he right!

Those of us lucky enough to attend the conference, held February 6-7 at the Adequan® West Coast Dressage Festival main arena in Del Mar, CA, soaked up as much information as

our brains could possibly process. Hinnemann, who has served as the German national dressage coach and who counts Olympians Ulla Salzgeber and Heike Kemmer among his many internationally successful students, is known worldwide as a rider, trainer, coach, and sport-horse breeder. This was his second time leading a Trainers Conference; his first appearance was in 2016, in Florida ("Precision Movements," April 2016).

Hinnemann's Principles

For Hinnemann, submission is the capstone of training; suppleness and obedience come first. Piaffe, he said, is the utmost in suppleness and submission.

"A supple horse is not necessarily submissive," Hinnemann said, "but a submissive horse is for sure supple."



THE MASTER IN ACTION: Conference attendees got a rare treat—the chance to see Hinnemann ride and train. He demonstrated aboard Dark Dynamic, owned by Sarah Runge.

"Work on the exactness of the training every day," Hinnemann advised. Success is not so much the result of talent as it is the product of meticulous, precise schooling. "That is what produces quality movements."

Hacking is important in Hinnemann's training regimen. Horses in his stable go for a one-hour hack outside, work for 30 to 45, and later are hacked out again, he said. He defines "hack" as "a marching walk on the buckle."

Selecting a Dressage Prospect

When Hinnemann evaluates a young horse, he first looks for an open and trusting eye. Then he wants to see intelligence and a natural attunement to the rider or handler, which he referred to as "culture." Growing up on his father's horse-breeding farm in Germany, the young Hinnemann noticed that the herd would gradually be culled as the youngsters began being handled. Asked what happened to them, the father replied that they



DEVELOPING EXCELLENCE: Clinician Johann Hinnemann works with demonstration pair David Wightman and Silberpfeil



BUILT FOR DRESSAGE: *Harvard, owned and ridden by Amelia Newcomb, has the rectangular shape and short cannon bones that Hinnemann favors*

“lacked culture.” Young horses that threw their heads around in the cross-ties, stepped on handlers’ feet, and lacked manners were not kept.

A dressage prospect should show good reach with the shoulder and front leg, and an active hind leg: It’s difficult for a trainer to get a slow horse quick, but easy to slow a quick horse down. As Hinnemann put it, “I like my horses in front like a lion and behind like a rabbit.”

Regarding conformation, Hinnemann prefers a horse with an “uphill” build and short cannon bones. A slightly longer back (a rectangular shape) is preferable to a short-coupled, “square” build because the ribs of a longer horse are spaced a bit farther apart and consequently such a horse is easier to bend, he said. And easier bending leads to greater suppleness.

The demonstration horse Harvard, owned and ridden by Amelia Newcomb, is a good example of the rectangular shape and short cannon bones that Hinnemann favors, he said.

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Hinnemann uses a unique gauge of a horse's topline muscling: the thickness of its dock and tail. In his experience, he said, the muscling of the tail is an indicator of the muscling of the back. "If the tail is too thin, then the horse has no back." Sparse tail hair is also not desirable, he said.

Training the Young Horse

Two coming four-year-olds demonstrated trot-canter and canter-trot transitions. When training a young horse to pick up the canter, Hinnemann told Kathleen Raine on Figaro and Emily Miles on Sole Mio, ask for the upward transition right before reaching the rail when on a circle. Maintain a high standard for both the canter depart and the quality of the canter, even with a youngster.

To develop Figaro's canter, think "uphill and go" in the transition, Hinnemann told Raine. He praised the young gelding's use of his hocks and admirably short cannon bones.

Like many trainers, if he has to choose Hinnemann prizes a good canter over a good trot, explaining that a "second trot"—with increased cadence and impulsion—can often be developed, whereas it is more difficult to improve the canter.

In the warm-up phase of the work, Hinnemann wants to see the horse in a "long and low" frame but with closed-up hind legs. When the rider asks the horse to stretch in the canter, either in the warm-up or during the work, Hinnemann wants to see the neck and nose stretch out and down, but not lower than the level of the shoulder. The horse must remain sufficiently balanced longitudinally to keep its hind legs underneath itself, even while stretching.

Hinnemann had Raine and Miles ride transitions to create suppleness. This is the basic training for submission, which is paramount. A submissive horse, he explained, lets all of the rider's aids go "through": back to front, front to back, left to right, and right to left.



YOUNG-HORSE TRAINING: "Forward with the nose out" followed by a chance to settle helped to produce better stretching and suppleness in the four-year-old stallion Sole Mio, ridden by Emily Miles

Hinnemann took a different approach with each of the four-year-olds. With Figaro, he started with long and low, then had Raine shorten her reins and work on developing a lengthened trot stride.

With Sole Mio, Hinnemann asked Miles to ride more forward with the nose out and then to relax and allow the horse to settle. "Nose out; calm down; nose out; calm down" helped to create better stretching and suppleness, as evidenced by the stallion's swinging tail.

"Take care of not letting the horse get behind the bit or too light in the bridle," Hinnemann cautioned Miles. "Far too strong in the bridle is also a problem. The nose should come out because of the connection from the hind leg."

A six-year-old horse may be more advanced in its training than a four-year-old, but it may still be growing and developing. Hinnemann noted that Steffen Peters' mount, Demetrios, was still a bit high behind.

To develop suppleness and engagement, Hinnemann had Peters work the stallion forward and back within shoulder-in positioning. Then he had the Olympian ride half-pass with varying degrees of bend.

Like his countryman Christoph Hess, who conducted the 2012 Trainers Conference, Hinnemann often advocates using the whip on the horse's shoulder to ask for more energy, instead of on its hindquarters. He had Peters use both approaches with Demetrios: sometimes higher on the horse's hip, to teach the stallion to "keep his shape" (while remaining undeterred by the fact that the horse occasionally reacted by swishing or tucking his tail); and sometimes on the shoulder, to activate the shoulder and encourage more forward swing.

Many riders let their horses "cruise" in the walk, treating the gait as a break. The horse must always be kept stepping actively forward so that in the show ring they won't think

Johann Hinnemann's Self-Check Exercises

Assess the correctness of your horse's training by periodically doing these exercises that German master Johann Hinnemann teaches all of his students and horses.

Check your horse's straightness: Ride simple changes on the center line. You should be able to change the flexion for each new canter lead without the horse's haunches or shoulders falling right or left.

Check your horse's submission: Three movements—walk pirouette, halt on the center line, and rein back—"show how good the training of a horse is."

Check the effectiveness of your half-halts: Are they working? Are they influencing your horse's entire body, as they should? "The half-halt has to come through or you just kick and kick and nothing happens!"

about dropping their backs in the walk work, Hinnemann said.

Lateral Work: Shoulder-in and Half-Pass

According to Hinnemann, shoulder-in rarely needs more bend, as is sometimes commented, because the movement has little bend. A shoulder-in may need more flexion or angle, although over-bending of the neck is a common fault.

"The most important thing about

the half-pass," he said, "is where you want to end up. Take care about the neck, then the haunches."

To facilitate greater bend and suppleness in a more advanced horse, Hinnemann had Dawn White-O'Connor ride a 10-meter circle in each corner before going into half-pass with the 10-year-old Bailarino. To refresh the energy and reward Bailarino for his efforts, White-O'Connor then rode down a long side in medium trot rising and patted the gelding. ➔

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Developing Collection in the Canter

“To prepare for the canter, take care of the straightness and that the canter starts from behind,” Hinnemann said.

With the eight-year-old Developing Prix St. Georges-level Silberpfeil, Hinnemann had David Wightman ride forward-and-back transitions within the gait to develop the pirouette canter and to refine the aids until the gelding was responding mostly to

Wightman’s seat. A series of canter-walk-canter transitions helped to develop submission.

Hinnemann finished by having Wightman ride medium canter on the diagonal with a simple change at the end. This exercise, Hinnemann explained, teaches the horse that he knows he has to come back for the corner—which then allows the rider to push more in the downward transition than in the forward, to produce greater impulsion. Brilliant!

To develop Harvard’s canter, Hinnemann had Newcomb work on collecting the canter and then riding it “up and out”: collected canter in shoulder-in position, followed by a halt and then counter-canter in shoulder-out position. The mantra: “Back and go, back and go, quick and active,” with a whip aid at the shoulder in the downward transitions to keep the canter jumping up. Harvard’s canter stride became noticeably more lofty in this exercise, and coming into the halt the horse had to adjust his balance in a forward manner, not backward.

Hinnemann had Peters work on keeping Demetrios’s neck up in the collected canter, using the phrase “inner ear up” to remind the rider to ask for collection with the inside leg. Hinnemann then had Peters ride transitions within the gait on a circle, collecting the canter on the rail side. The exercise expanded to: canter half-pass, simple change, forward and back on a circle, forward down the next long side, then half-pass again.

With Bailarino, Hinnemann had White-O’Connor ride pirouette canter into haunches-in, then into piaffe, and back to collected canter. He had the rider play with her wrist to help keep the horse supple and “through.”

Pirouette Work

Collected canter is a prerequisite for canter pirouettes. “Once the horse is sitting well, it is able to push,” Hinnemann said.

Pirouettes require that the rider has control over every part of the horse’s body: “The neck must be still, and one must have control of the haunches and the neck with haunches in.” To test this control, Hinnemann had Wightman work on collecting Silberpfeil’s canter on the center line.

Hinnemann helped demo rider Lehua Custer achieve a more uphill balance in collected canter aboard F.J. Ramzes. He had Custer alternate between shoulder-in and leg-yield out while keeping the connection to the horse’s mouth lower in order to keep

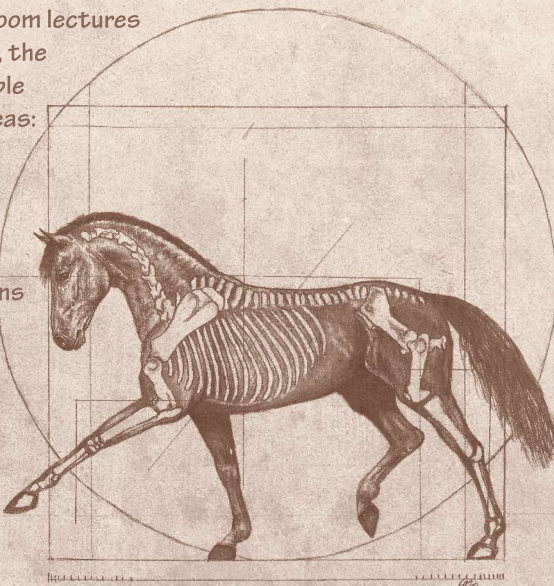
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CANTER WORK: Think “inner ear up” from the rider’s inside leg to help develop collection, Hinnemann told Steffen Peters on Demetrios



UPHILL BALANCE: FJ. Ramzes, ridden by Lehua Custer

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him rounder. Next, Custer cantered down center line, walking before reaching A or C and riding a walk pirouette. Once this pattern was confirmed, the walk was omitted and Custer executed a canter pirouette instead.

Flying Changes

Hinnemann does not train flying changes of lead using changes of direction, explaining that doing so tempts the horse to change in front

first. Similarly, he does not like to use ground poles in training flying changes. The poles, he said, can cause the horse not to change from behind and as a result can teach the horse to be late behind in the changes.

Instead, Hinnemann uses transitions within the gait as preparation for flying changes. All changes and sequences of changes (tempi changes) should be ridden “collect-forward, collect-forward,” he said. His flying-change preparatory

exercise incorporates walk-canter, canter-walk, and walk-counter-canter transitions:

Establish the collected canter on a circle. Then canter down the long side in shoulder-in position. On the next diagonal, alternate between true canter and counter-canter with simple changes of lead, changing the bend from true bend to counter-bend (“outside-in and inside-out”). Finally, ride counter-canter on a line—Hinnemann variously used the quarter line, the center line, and the diagonal in the conference—establish counter-bend to put the horse slightly off balance, and then ask for a flying change as the horse approaches the rail.

After the horse is comfortable and confident executing single flying changes in each direction, trainers gradually introduce tempi changes. Hinnemann had White-O’Connor work on the four-tempis (changes at every fourth stride) by riding eight-meter circles in the corners to collect Bailarino’s canter, supple his topline, and put him more on the rider’s seat.

The ultimate execution of tempi changes is one-tempis—a flying change at every stride. When introducing one-tempis, start by asking for just two changes in sequence. “The one-tempis left to right and right to left have to be easy; then it’s no problem” to build up to more ones in sequence, Hinnemann said. And in training, “Walk after a line of tempis to educate them to breathe.”

Peters, a native of Germany who grew up near Hinnemann’s farm, made the conference audience chuckle at a story about his time as a working student for the master. Exhilarated after riding his first line of one-tempis, Peters realized he had a lot to learn when Hinnemann said, “Could I see the straight version of that?”

Passage and Piaffe

You can have a good Intermediate and Prix St. Georges horse, but it’s not until you tackle the passage and piaffe work that you find out whether you



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PIAFFE WORK: *Hinnemann assists from the ground as Dawn White-O'Connor helps Bailarino find his balance*

have a Grand Prix horse, according to Hinnemann.

The required changes in balance make the transitions between piaffe and passage difficult. And the transitions are “not possible with a pulling aid; it is only possible with a pushing aid,” Hinnemann said.

To develop Silberpfeil’s trot toward piaffe and passage work, Hinnemann had Wightman ride the horse’s neck more up and out. Then he went to piaffe half-steps, riding transitions forward out of the collection and then back into half-steps. Next came some lateral movements in a working trot to build strength and create more “air time.” Walk-trot-walk transitions while keeping the poll the highest point helped to relax the horse and encourage his back to swing.

It can be challenging to bring a big trot back into passage or piaffe, Hinnemann acknowledged. “One has to take care of the balance.”

Finding the correct tempos is key in developing a passage and piaffe

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with correct balance. Hinnemann wanted to encourage Breanna to passage with shorter, quicker steps. He had rider Kathleen Raine go from medium trot to passage, followed by quarter-turns to shorten the steps.

The Art and Craft of Competition

Attention to detail in the daily training instills in the rider the standard of excellence needed to succeed in dressage competition. When he was a student of the late legendary German rider and trainer Harry Boldt, Hinnemann related, Boldt instructed him to keep a riding journal. After every ride,



ENERGY FOR TEMPO: To shorten and quicken Breanna's passage steps, Kathleen Raine rode medium trot (shown) before channeling the energy into the passage

Acknowledgments

The USDF is grateful to the following for their help and support in making the 2018 FEI-Level Trainers Conference a success:

- Christine Traurig
- Adequan® West Coast Dressage Festival
- Scott Hayes
- Kim Dennis
- Heather Petersen and her staff.

And many thanks to the demonstration riders, horses, and owners: Lehua Custer, North Hollywood, CA, on F.J. Ramzes, an eight-year-old KWPN gelding by Juventus, owned by Wendy Sasser; Heidi Gaian, Hollister, CA, on Daumling, an 11-year-old Hanoverian gelding by DeNiro, owned by Johann Hinnemann; Emily Miles, Overland Park, KS, on Sole Mio, a four-year-old Rheinland stallion owned by Leslie Waterman; Amelia Newcomb, Simi Valley, CA, on her own Harvard, a six-year-old KWPN gelding by Charmeur; Steffen Peters, San Diego, CA, on Demetrios, a six-year-old Rheinland stallion by Diamond Hit, owned by Taylor Rowsey; Kathleen Raine, Murrieta, CA, on Breanna, an 18-year-old Hanoverian mare by Brentano II, co-owned by David Wightman, Jennifer Mason, and the rider; and on Figaro, a four-year-old Westfalen gelding by Fürstenball, co-owned by David Wightman, Marti Foster, and the rider.

Dawn White-O'Connor, San Diego, CA, on Bailarino, a 10-year-old Oldenburg gelding by Breitling W, owned by Akiko Yamazaki and Four Winds Farm LLC

David Wightman, Murrieta, CA, on Silberpfeil, an eight-year-old Hanoverian gelding by Silberschmeid, owned by Kathleen Raine.



THE SETTING: Adequan® West Coast Dressage Festival main arena, site of the conference



AT EASE: Hinnemann can be a taskmaster for the rider, but he's sympathetic to the horse

Hinnemann would make notes—not just generalities but things like how he prepared the horse for corners and what he did to check its balance and rhythm. This level of precision eventually becomes second nature and helps the rider to produce the most accurate and correct tests possible.

Extensive preparation also helps horse and rider feel confident, so that showing does not present a new level of difficulty but rather is a natural extension of the daily work. And confidence fosters relaxation. According to Hinnemann, the art of riding and competing in dressage occurs in the warm-up ring. The key to success, he said, is “whether or not a rider can create a greater degree of inner calm within the horse and themselves during the warm-up.”

Some of the top dressage competitors in history are famous for their ability to relax before going in the show ring. One of Hinnemann's trainers, the late German Olympic gold medalist Dr. Reiner Klimke, was known for napping for 10 to 20 minutes before a test, Hinnemann said.

Find the Best Approach

Hinnemann stressed the importance in training of finding a way to get the horse to work with the rider, without the use of force.

“Where pressure starts, intelligence ends,” he said. ▲

Instructor/trainer Nancy Gorton owns and operates Pine Hill Farm in Kansas City, MO. An FEI-level competitor, she is a USDF bronze and silver medalist

and the current USDF Region 4 FEI junior/young rider coordinator and chef d'équipe.

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