

THE PYRAMID OF TRAINING – IMPULSION

Increased Energy and Thrust

“Impulsion is the term used to describe the transmission of an eager and energetic, yet controlled, propulsive thrust generated from the hindquarters into the athletic movement of the horse. Impulsion is associated with a phase of suspension such as exists in trot and canter, but not in walk. It is measured by the horse’s desire to carry himself forward, the elasticity of his steps, suppleness of his back, and engagement of his hindquarters. Impulsion is necessary to develop medium paces, and later on, with the added ingredient of collection, extended paces.” [USDF Glossary of Judging Terms]

Impulsion is first developed in the correctly ridden ‘working trot’ and ‘working canter’.

“Impulsion is the term used to describe the transmission of an eager and energetic, yet controlled, propulsive energy generated from the hind quarters into the athletic movement of the horse. Its ultimate expression can be shown only through the horse’s soft and swinging back to be guided by a gentle contact with the rider’s hand.” [FEI Rule Book Article 416]

“A horse is said to have impulsion when the energy created by the hind legs is being transmitted into the gait and into every aspect of the forward movement. A horse can be said to be working with impulsion when it pushes off energetically from the ground and swings its feet well forward.” [Principles of Riding, p. 157]

“The movements are absorbed by the horse’s back muscles, so that the rider can sit softly and ‘go with’ the movement, while still feeling the powerful forward thrust of the hind legs; the horse is said to ‘take the rider with it.’” [The Principles of Riding, p.157]

“Impulsion must be developed. Suppleness [looseness] comes first. Without suppleness and obedience to the rider’s aids, there can be no impulsion. When the horse’s muscle development and the degree of suppleness allows him to bring his haunches under him, he can achieve impulsion.” [Practical Dressage Manual, p 27]

Qualities

Impulsion is measured by the horse’s desire to move forward, the elasticity of his steps, suppleness of the back and engagement of the hindquarters.

“When the horse swings through his back and has found a secure contact, the pushing and carrying ability of the quarters can be improved as the training advances. The Schwung (impulsion) shows itself in an elastic lifting placing of the quarters.” [The Dressage Horse, p 114]

“To be able to work with impulsion, the horse needs first to be able to show looseness, a springy, swinging back and a soft correct contact.” [Principles of Riding, p.157]

Faults

“If the horse is pushed too hard so that it quickens its steps, the moment of suspension is shortened because it puts its feet down sooner. Even if the rhythm is maintained, if the tempo is too fast the impulsion will suffer as a result.” [Principles of Riding, p. 157]

If the horse is working with impulsion, the moment of suspension will be more pronounced. However, it should not be exaggerated, since this would denote incorrect hovering steps, which are associated with tension. [The Principles of Riding, p.165]

“Lack of impulsion can be revealed, for instance, in a backward tendency at halts, turns on the forehand and half-turns on the haunches and lateral movements which are not fluid or forward enough.” [Practical Dressage Manual, p 27]