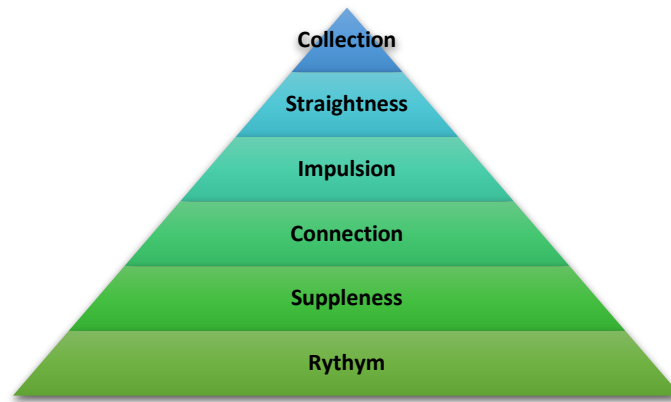


Who's Dressage Good For, Anyways?



The Dressage Training Scale

You may already have heard of the dressage training scale; perhaps you've heard of it and dressage is just "not your thing" and you're into another discipline.

Whether your goals are to jump a grand prix course at Spruce Meadows, to clean up in the Hunter Jumpers at Royal Winter Fair, to take up Western Dressage or to just enjoy your rides and want a long lasting, healthy relationship with your horse, the fundamentals of dressage can be applied to, and support every discipline. Julia Vysniauskas, Grand Prix Rider, WEG and CDI Circuit Competitor who's currently in California conditioning horses for HITS Thermal tells us how:

1. Establishing a solid rhythm – being able to establish and maintain a tempo helps to develop strength, stamina, and proper equine conditioning. In the jumping horse, developing this allows a horse that travels to fences with a clear gait, supports the ability to adjust between fences and prevent rushing or pushing in the mouth. This makes for not only a nicer ride overall but a more effective one.
2. Suppleness – dressage exercises foster lateral suppleness in the horse's body. Developing elasticity and relaxation and preventing "blocking" through the horse fosters the ability to shorten and elongate strides between jumps smoothly and without tension. An elastic horse is a comfortable one, less likely to evade through sloppy jumping and refusals.
3. Connection – Better communication between horse and rider; create a respectful ride where we understand what the horse is looking for and the horse is inexplicably clear on what our cues mean. A horse this is on the aids is responsive and receptive; dressage can help us create an environment where the horse's job is to make good decisions, and our job as riders is merely to be consistent. A half halt that is available to you and easily accepted by the horse is pivotal to any ride.
4. Impulsion – Create a horse that moves hind to front, leg to hand; 95% of the time, Jewels sees horses lurching through jumps, overusing their necks, shoulders and sternum – overusing the front end and forgetting the hind end, which is where the true motor lies. Correct training creates impulsion and a solid engine.
5. Straightness – achieving straightness in the horse and balance in the rider is not only correct from a musculature perspective, in the hunter or hunter-jumper it allows for jumps to be approached with precision and control.
6. Collection – the top of the dressage training scale, the ability for the horse to carry his/herself. Though you're not likely to see a piaffe in the jumper ring, at least not intentionally, the ability to ask and receive collection is the ultimate in demonstrating physical development in the horse, balance in both horse and rider, and true harmony in our relationship – isn't that what we were all after when we were all horse crazy 9 year olds, after all?



Julia Vysniauskas is a trainer, coach and clinician and WEG Competitor. Based in Calgary at Kestrel Ridge farms, Jewels has brought multiple horses and riders up from Training level through to Grand Prix, has trained with competitive show jumpers and is currently conditioning horses for HITS Thermal in California. An advocate for dressage and correct training, Jewels teaches the same fundamentals principles to western dressage riders, jumpers, hunters, and dressage and working equitation clientele.