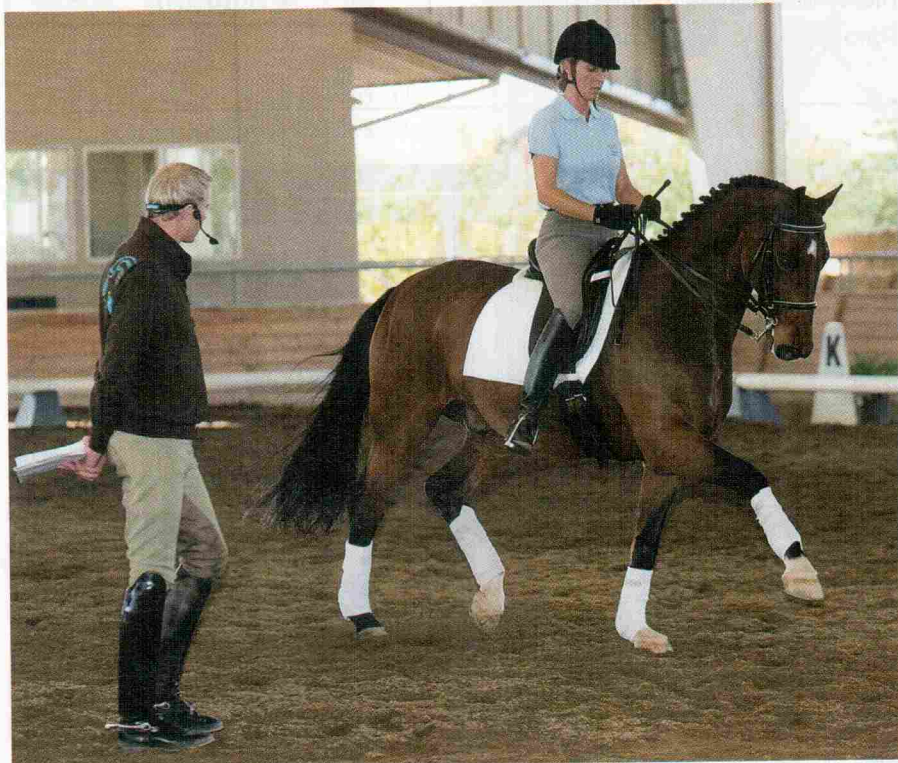


The Brink of Success

Guidance and training advice from Swedish champion Jan Brink

BY MELISSA CRESWICK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERI SCOTT



LEARNING PROCESS: Jan Brink schools Tanya Vik and Divinity 3

GREG AND MICHELE VAUGHN'S lovely, state-of-the-art Starr Vaughn Equestrian Center in Elk Grove, CA, was the site of the 2007 Succeed/USDF FEI-Level Trainers' Conference, featuring Swedish international dressage competitor Jan Brink.

With his best-known equine partner, the Swedish Warmblood stallion Briar 899, Brink has competed in numerous FEI Dressage World Cup Finals and European Championships. They represented Sweden at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games and at the 2002 and 2006 World Equestrian Games.

The Happy Athlete

To Brink, the horse's well-being comes first. His training facility is set up so that

all horses can enjoy turnout time. For variety in their six-day-a-week training sessions, there is a galloping field and a jumping ring; horses jump once a week.

"Listen to your horse every day. He will tell you how he feels," Brink said during the October 27-28 event. If there is a problem, it is always the rider's responsibility, he stressed.

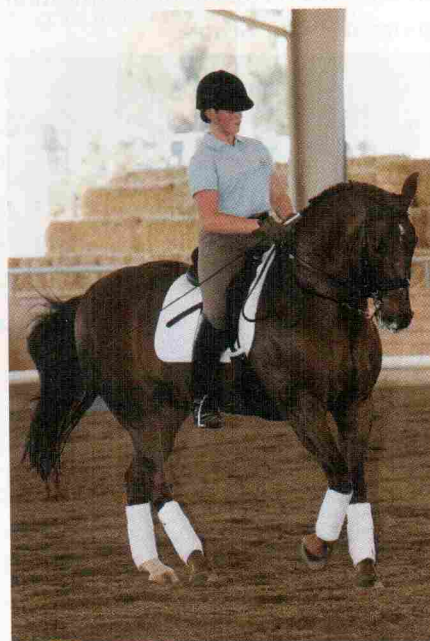
Team Effort

Brink regards the rider as part of a team. After all, he pointed out, it takes many people to get a horse to the top levels of the sport: rider, sponsor, mentor, veterinarian, farrier, trainer, family members, and groom.

The rider must be mentally and physically fit and should have an education

in the theoretical knowledge of horsemanship. The rider must also be humble and open-minded, with both short- and long-term goals. Brink said he keeps a journal of every ride, which serves as a reference for any horse at any time during the training. It is good to look back through the pages to find where you had success and what you did that might be a help in the training when you hit a trouble spot, he said.

An important member of any rider's team is the person Brink calls a mentor: someone in the industry—not necessarily the trainer—who can support the rider in both success and failure as the rider gains experience. The mentor helps to bring out the best in the rider, helps to guide the rider through the years of training, and assists the rider in setting goals. Brink's own mentor, the Finnish



CROWD FAVORITE: Against All Odds, a rescued Belgian/Quarter Horse/Thoroughbred cross owned and ridden by Courtenay Fraser and trained to Grand Prix



STRIVING FOR HARMONY: Michael Etherly and Dejima

champion Kyra Kyrklund, has worked with him for sixteen years, Brink said.

Training Tips and Exercises

After watching the demonstration riders warm up, Brink customized patterns and exercises to help each horse and rider. (See the list of demonstration riders and horses on page 12.) One of Brink's priorities is a clear response to the rider's leg. If a horse was not quick off the leg, Brink wanted one quick kick and for the rider to let the horse go forward but without losing the horse's outline. He also wanted the horses to be able to take quicker or longer steps without changing the rhythm. Making the outline longer or shorter with no change in rhythm is an important training principle, he said.

As soon as the horse responds correctly, pat him; do not wait to give the reward, Brink said. He explained that the horse thinks in the past and in the "now," so if you reward a good response later, he will not know why you are doing it.

Straightness was next on Brink's checklist. If a horse was crooked, Brink had the rider do shoulder-in and renvers on the center line and on the quarter line. By doing these exercises away from the wall, the rider ensures that the horse is on the aids for straightness.

Brink likes to mix up the exercises to keep the horse attentive and obedient when the shows come along. With young horses, he begins with shallow leg-yields, progressing to steeper lines as the horses get

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THE DEMONSTRATION RIDERS AND HORSES



TEAM EFFORT: Clinician Jan Brink (back row, right) and Starr Vaughn Equestrian Center owners Greg (back row, left) and Michele Vaughn (front row, right) pose with the demonstration riders

USDF gratefully acknowledges the demonstration riders, horses, and owners whose efforts helped to make the 2007 Succeed/USDF FEI-Level Trainers' Conference a success:

- Taryn Briones riding her own Ghita
- Michael Etherly riding his own Dejima
- Courtenay Fraser riding her own Against All Odds
- Dirk Glitz riding Fabienne, owned by Angelika Schuckert
- Elizabeth Hendrix riding Donna Novella, owned by Melissa Mulchahey
- Heather Robertson riding her own Vancouver
- Jeremy Steinberg riding Elisienne, owned by Jessica Lyman
- Tanya Vik riding her own Divinity 3.

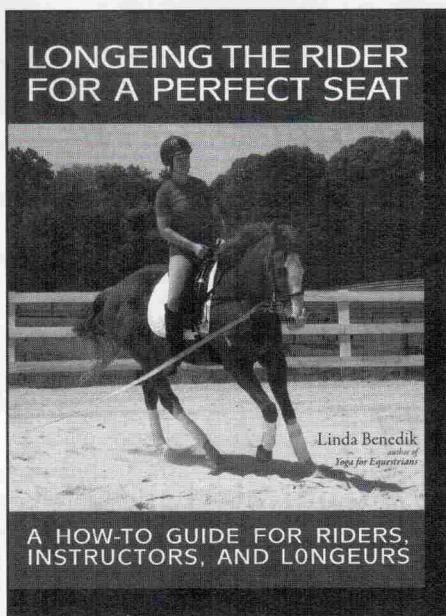
stronger. When the young horse is ready, changing from shoulder-in to renvers and back again helps to develop suppleness.

In the trot, one exercise was to ride half-pass to the center line, then to straighten and ride medium trot to the corner. Changing from half-pass to renvers helps to keep the horse straight before the change of bend to the new direction.

Brink uses counter-canter to correct crookedness in the canter. More-advanced horses were asked for half-pass and flying changes. Half-pass and then renvers were used to control the horse that was not straight to the new direction for the change or that tried to change before being asked. Unless the horse is on the aids, Brink does not ask for the change. If the horse was hot to the work, Brink wanted the riders to mix up the work so that the horse listens: five steps of canter half-pass, followed by five steps straight ahead; repeat. When the horse is relaxed, ask for the change.

When riding flying changes, "Make your line like a tunnel, and ride through the tunnel," Brink said. "Never punish the horse for a late response or late changes; punishing can only cause tension. Horses never forget."

One of the interesting things that Brink talked about and showed when riding some of the demo horses was the use of piaffe and canter pirouettes. Both,



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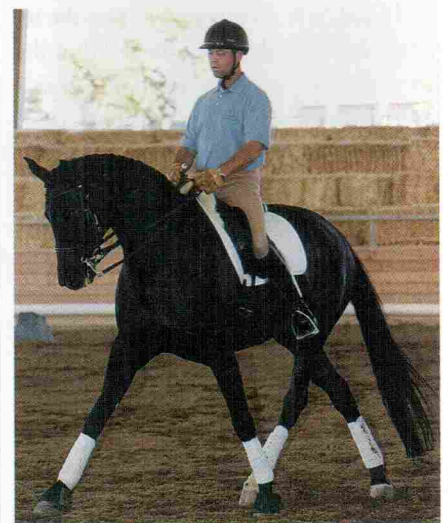
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FOR CENTURIES, European masters have maintained that riding on the longe line is *the* best method for achieving an exemplary seat and impeccable equitation. Now, this step-by-step guide to both longeing others and being longed allows riders at every level to maximize learning and refine their riding skills.

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- ∞ Supple the midsection, and upper and lower body while mounted
- ∞ Transition from "following" the horse's movement to "leading" and improving it



HALF-PASS FOR STRAIGHTNESS: Dirk Glitz and Fabienne

he said, are similar in the level of activity that they require and therefore can be used together to develop greater activity in both movements. Amazing piaffes and canter pirouettes developed with the use of active piaffe on a circle before asking for the canter pirouettes. Brink rode both movements on the circle, one to the other and back again.

In the Zone

According to Brink, there are three zones that all riders experience during some part of the training process. The first is the well-known "comfort zone," which is used to keep horse and rider secure with what is being asked of them.

The second is the "stretch zone," in which horse and rider stretch the training to a new level. A new movement or greater engagement, straightness, or collection are examples of developments that take place in the stretch zone.

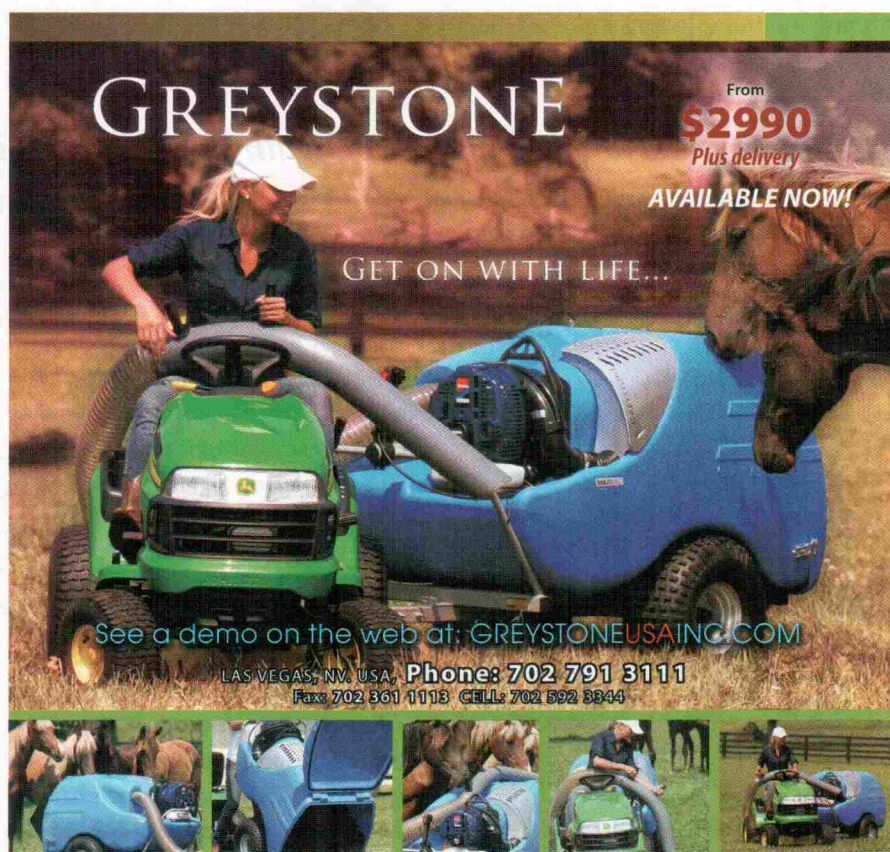
The third zone is the undesirable "panic zone," which results from too much being asked of the horse or the rider, from a misunderstanding of the aids, or from fear.

Riders need to understand their own skill levels as well as those of their horses in order to recognize the zones and to advance the training, Brink said. As the Trainers' Conference proceeded, the audience could see Brink taking the demonstration horses and riders into their stretch zone, returning to their comfort zone for confirmation of the training.

Brink showed a wonderful understanding of the riders' and horses' skills and abilities. All the horses were of good talent and well ridden.

The Vaughns were presented with thank-you gifts for hosting a great seminar. In turn, Greg Vaughn, a retired Major League Baseball player, gave Brink a uniquely American memento of his trip to California: a signed baseball bat and ball from the World Series. What a gift! ▲

Melissa Creswick is a USEF "S" judge and a member of the USDF Connection editorial advisory committee. She lives in Clovis, CA.



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10th Anniversary

The Pennsylvania Riding Academy, founded by Paul Belasik is celebrating its 10th Anniversary of offering the short courses. Hundreds of people from over 20 countries have participated in these intensives dedicated to improving the rider's seat, and allowing visitors to see all daily training of horses, from just being broken in to Grand Prix and even Airs.

~"I have never worked so hard or had so much fun as I did during Paul's short courses...Paul is very approachable, and the relaxed atmosphere made me feel comfortable asking lots of questions. These courses truly changed my riding life and enhanced my dressage education." -Alice McCoy, MD

~"By working with me on his horses who are so well educated to the proper use of the rider's seat, Paul was able over the course of several visits to transform a number of positional and training practices...It was amazingly easy to transfer the work and new feelings gleaned at the Academy to horses at home." -Sophie H. Pirie Clifton, JD, LLM; instructor and trainer

~"...it is an experience like no other: The unmatched opportunity to ride true schoolmasters under the tutelage of an internationally recognized instructor combined with the chance to observe the daily training of horses of all ages as they progress through the levels of dressage."

-Jennifer Swanson, MD & Charles Miller, DVM

FMI please see www.paulbelasik.com