

THOUGHTS ON THE EDUCATION OF (COMPETITION) HORSES

BY MASTER TRAINER EYJÓLFUR ÍSÓLFSSON
PHOTOS: PRIVATE, JOHANNA BERG, JENS EINARSSON, ANDREAS HEJNDORF

The purpose of educating horses for competition is described in the FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) rules:

“The object of training is the development of the Horse into a happy Athlete through harmonious education. As a result, it makes the Horse calm, supple, loose and flexible, but also confident, attentive and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with the Rider.”

These qualities are demonstrated by:

- The freedom and regularity of the paces.
- The harmony, lightness and ease of the movements.
- The lightness of the forehand and the engagement of the hindquarters, originating from a lively impulsion.
- The acceptance of the bit, with submissiveness/thoroughness of the aids without any tension or resistance.

Formålet med uddannelse af heste til konkurrence står beskrevet i FEI's regler:

“Formålet med træningen er at udvikle hesten til en glad atlet gennem harmonisk uddannelse. Resultatet skal være en rolig, smidig, løsgjort og fleksibel hest, som også er selvsikker, opmærksom, villig og glad, hvorved der opnås perfekt forståelse med rytteren.”

”Disse kvaliteter er udtrykt ved:

- Frie og regelmæssige gangarter.
- Harmoni, lethed og ubesværede bevægelser.
- Letthed i forparten og bæringen i bagparten stammer fra en livlig aktivitet.
- Accept af biddet og indvirkningerne uden nogen spænding eller modstand.”

Eyjólfur Ísólfsson and Rás from Ragnheiðarstadir
winner of Tólt at Landsmót 2002



Train the ingredients - not the goal

Education of horses must be done with knowledge, feeling and respect. Communication and trust must form the basis of the education. Preservation and improvement of the horse's mental and physical health must be of the highest priority. Relaxation is the foundation of the horses' education, without this the horse cannot learn. The basic training is a prerequisite for later specialization. It is important to train the horse in each individual part or ingredient before being able to compose the different parts into a unified whole. If one has difficulties, one must correct the part not working. In the picture you see the different

parts drawn in a circle to illustrate that they influence each other. (See last page in article)

Tempo

In order to control the tempo, the horse must accept the rider's leadership. This means controlling the fast as well as the slow tempo. The horse must think truly forward in all situations in order to perform at its best. Some trainers have misinterpreted the forward thinking to always chase the horse into rushing resulting in a loss of balance and bearing. You could say that the brakes must function as well as the accelerator pedal.

Slowing down the horse and bringing it to a halt is best improved through bending and lateral movements. The backing up is a valuable tool to develop good slowing down and halt. We need balance between stop and go – both should be evenly easy to perform.

Direction

The horse must go happy and willingly forward in any direction. If the horse won't cooperate with the rider, it will stiffen its gaits and damaging the performance. The riders' aids must influence the legs and feet of the horse to get its attention and respect. Good behavior should be made easy and comfortable for the horse, and bad behavior should have demanding consequences, but not punishment.

Gait

In the basic education of the horse you must remember Tempo – Direction – Gait. It is difficult to achieve control over the gait, without first controlling tempo and direction. In order to develop good gaits with a steady clear-beat and regularity, the horse must be calm, supple and forward. If the horse is educated to the rider's aids and the rider has control of the different parts of the horse's body, the rider can help the horse to find the gait. The development of a gait depends on the posture and balance of the horse.

- Relaxation is the foundation of horse training.
- You must control the parts before you can control the whole.
- The rider's aids should affect the horse's legs in order to get its attention and respect.
- Straightness is everything, crookedness hinders everything.
- A long, loose neck is important to the well-being and balance of the horse.
- The reward is the difficult task of doing nothing at the right time.
- Happy horses perform better.
- Transitions are a key for improving balance.
- Take the horse to the limit but never over the limit.
- Energy without relaxation is tension.

Bend

Lateral movements – bending – supple spine: In order to bend a horse correctly, you need to be able to do lateral work. Lateral work requires the horse to move forwards and sideways at the same time. This is important for horses that lack suppleness, but most importantly for horses with stiffness.

Bending stretches the outside muscles of the horse, and influence the neck to stretch forward and down. A supple spine is a prerequisite for good gaits and better balance. Collection starts when riding a circle, the inside hind leg steps in under the horse. The work with the bending continues in the shoulder-in where the horse also steps the inside hind leg under its centre of gravity. Similarly, the bending is found in the travers (haunches in) and the renvers (haunches out), yet here the outside hind leg needs to step in under the horse's center of gravity.

These exercises develop the muscles of the horse's hindquarters and are therefore an essential part of a higher level of education. You should not require too much at an early stage. Build the horse's strength, suppleness and trust. Good basic lateral work makes collection more attainable.

Straight

Straightness is everything, crookedness hinders everything. All horses are born with natural crookedness. Crookedness results in stress and tension that affect different horses in very different ways. Crookedness does have a negative influence on the gait, the movements and the rhythm. Heaviness on the forehand and crookedness are directly related. There is no crookedness without heaviness in front. Collection is not possible if the horse is crooked. The most common misalignment in Icelandic horses is when the weight falls diagonally from the left hind leg to the right shoulder and front leg. Therefore the horse finds bending to the left side easier than to the right side, which tends to be stiff. Moving the forequarters to the right is easier than to the left. Moving the hindquarters to the left is easier than to the right. Consequently, training on the right and left hand requires different approaches. The shoulder-in is necessary for straightness, yet it has to be adapted to the horse's natural misalignment.

The horse (with the most common misalignment) tends to relieve the left hind leg, the leg of its soft side. This hind leg needs to be strengthened if the horse is to carry equal weight on both hind legs.

"The stiff side and the difficult side" is what Gustav Steinbrecht called it in his famous book: "Gymnasium des Pferdes". Both sides need to be worked on, but by means of very different approaches. Therefore referring to it as a good and a bad side is not accurate. When the horse carries the same weight on its left and right side, it is considered straight.

Posture

Posture is a term dealing with the horse's use of its entire body.

The horse has a long neck, which has great influence on its posture and balance. If the neck is tense, stiff, or the horse above or behind the bit, this has a negative impact on its balance. If the horse has tension in its poll or neck, its spine is not supple. A supple spine is a prerequisite for increasing the horse's bearing thereby improving its movements.

Freedom and suppleness is achieved by releasing muscle tension. Riding the horse "forward and down" is an important phase. The rider needs to focus on getting the horse's forehead forward and the neck as long as possible. The bending of the horse has a lot of impact to prolong the neck forward and down.

It is important to recognize that the lower posture creates the ability to have the more collected posture later. The rider needs to be able to vary the position of the neck in accordance with the task at hand and should always be able to stretch the horse's neck forward and down. Once the horse has a supple spine, increasing the activity of its hindquarters is made possible. Activity in the hindquarters is essential to for the development of the gait and the movements.

Increasing activity in a horse, which has not achieved a supple spine is wrong and leads to stiffness.

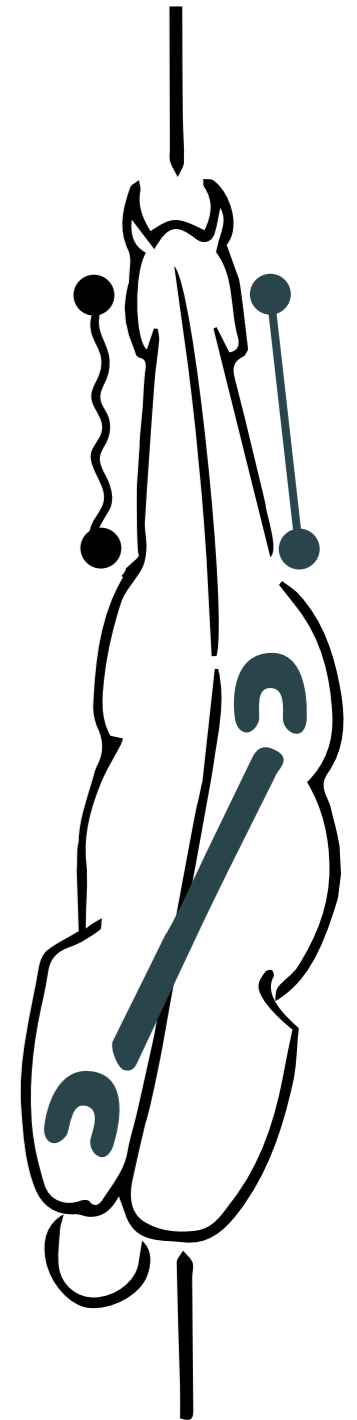
Happy

The relationship between the horse and the rider should be built on communication and trust resulting in harmony of mind and movement. The rider should at all times be looking for an opportunity to reward the horse for its efforts. This will motivate the horse to do better. The reward is the difficult art of doing nothing at the right time.

Try to avoid applying opposing aids at the same time. It is possible to drive a car with the hand brake on, but the result will never be good. If the driving and restraining aids are used simultaneously, the horse becomes uncommunicative, claustrophobic, stiff and tense or shuts off and becomes reclusive. Contradictory signals will confuse the horse and the horse's response to the aids will become duller and duller and it will not perform as usual. In order for the horse to be keen and willing, it needs to understand what is demanded of it. And the horse needs to have the posture and balance required by the task it is asked to do. The horse needs harmony in his body to be comfortable and happy.

You will want to make training seem as if it is the horse's idea as much as possible. The trainer should only offer the horse choices that result in the horse finding the path. The horse is the decision-maker leaving it happy and confident. Happy horses perform better.

— About 70% of the Icelandic horses have a natural born crookedness - like the one in the picture - about 30% have the opposite.



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Balance

The horse's natural balance lays approximately 60% on its front legs and 40% on its hind legs. The weight of the rider weighs heavier on the front than on the hind. Collection is the state of the horse in which the forehead is relieved by the load transfer to the engaged hindquarters. Collection is the balance that offers the horse maximum mobility. The horse is collected when he brings his hind leg forward under the center of gravity, by bending the hindquarters and also by letting the center of mass be brought back to the hind legs. Collection is important to the durability of the horse because the horse learns how to carry the rider with the stronger hind legs. A short compressed neck does not contribute to collection. Actually, it prevents good balance since it compresses the spine and makes the movement of the hind legs more difficult. Collection starts on the circle by the horse stepping under the center gravity with the inside hind leg. This work is to be continued in the shoulder-in, the travers (haunches in) the renvers (haunches out) and the turn on the haunches.

The rider can't force the horse into collection. It requires systematic education, exercise and training of the hindquarters for the horse to succeed in doing it. The backing up is an important exercise where the horse learns how to move its weight to its

hind legs. It is also an exercise that helps prepare the horse for transitions. Transitions are when moving from one gait to another. Transitions to and from the halt. Transitions to and from an exercise and lastly, but not least, transitions from one tempo to another within the same gait. In transitions the driving and restraining aids should in no way be contradictory, only one active aid at the time. Correctly ridden transitions are a key exercise for improving the horse's balance, suppleness, obedience to the aids, and collection.

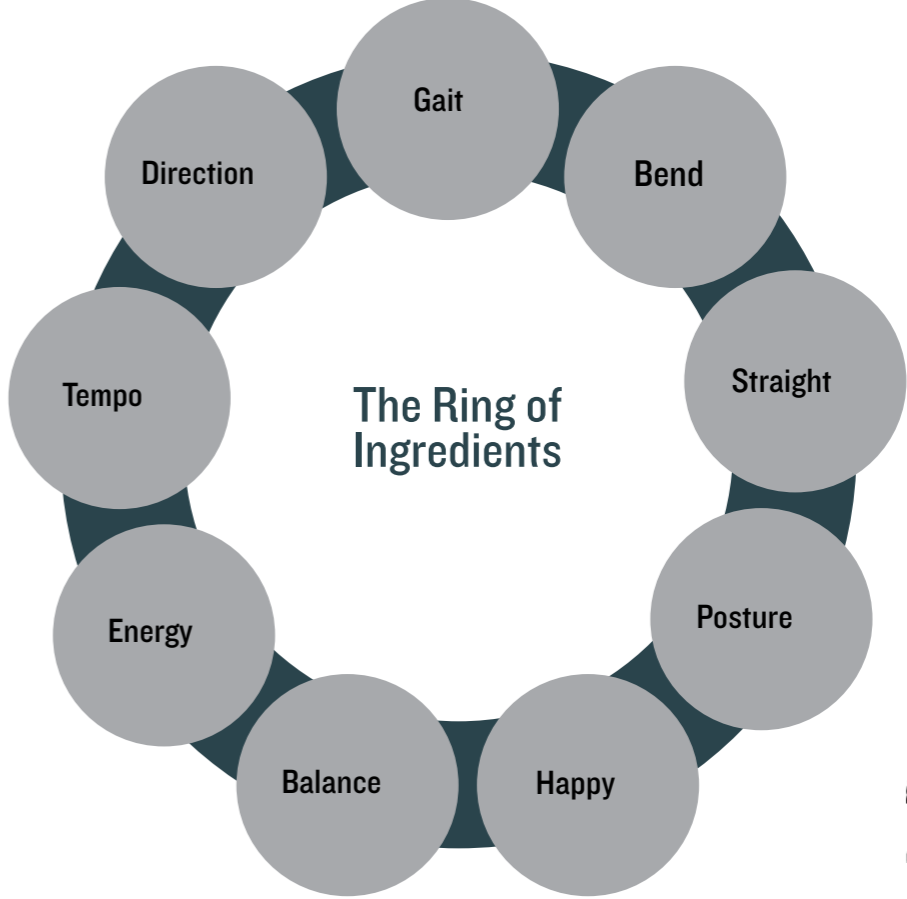
Energy

No performance works without energy. Once the rider succeeds in combining energy with softness and flexibility, obedience and correct body posture, the horse will move well. The rider needs to control the energy of the horse - increasing or decreasing it as required. If the horse is constantly forced to work at maximum energy, it gets stressed, stiff and tense harming the horse's health and the quality of the gait. If the horse is stressed, it should be ridden at a loose rein and the rider will gain control and relaxation through bending with one rein. Doing sharp transitions practices increasing energy. The rider rewards the horse for moving his legs lighter and faster. It is the reaction of the legs, not the speed of the horse that is rewarded. A fast, short high tempo sprint

may also help increase the energy of the horse. A good trainer knows how much he can demand from a horse and he also knows when to stop. You need to find your horse's limit, and take him to it, but never over the limit. If you drive a car to the red area of the tachometer, you'll damage the engine. You should never drive a horse to the red area as this level of stress may cause irreparable damage to the horse's psyche. The rider needs to determine where the red line is for each horse he rides. A good rider can sense it through the horse's nerves and reactions. A competition horse should be brave, proud and confident that he can do the task at hand.

More information:
www.toltmaster.com

Education of the Competition Horse



Tanker om uddannelsen af (konkurrence) hesten

At uddanne hesten i ingredienserne – ikke målet. Uddannelse af heste skal gennemføres med viden, følelse og respekt. Uddannelsen skal skabe et forhold af kommunikation og tillid. Bevarelse og forbedring af hestens mentale og fysiske helbred skal være af højeste prioritet. Afslapning er grundlaget for hestens uddannelse, uden den kan hesten ikke lære. Det grundlæggende arbejde er forudsætning for den senere specialisering.

Det er vigtigt at uddanne hesten i hver enkel del eller ingrediens før man sætter delene sammen til en helhed. Man skal kunne styre hver del, før man kan styre helheden. Hvis man kommer i problemer må man rette den del, der ikke fungerer. På billedet på forrige side er de forskellige dele sat op i en cirkel for at pege på, at de har indflydelse på hinanden.

Tempo

Kontrol over tempoet kræver, at hesten accepterer rytterens lederskab. Det betyder kontrol over både hurtigt og langsomt tempo. Hesten skal tænke ærligt fremad i alle situationer for at yde sit bedste. Nogle trænere har formået at misfortolke opfordringen af ”fremad” som en tilladelse til konstant at jage hesten op i høj fart og det resulterer i det modsatte af balance og bæring.

Bremsen skal være lige så god som speederen. Det er bedst at udvikle en god nedtagning og parade igennem bøjning og sidebevægelse. Tilbagetrædning har ligeledes stor betydning for at få hesten til at være god til nedtagning og stoppe.

Vi har brug for en balance imellem stop og fremad - det skal være lige let at udføre begge dele.

Retning

Hesten skal gå glad og villig fremad i alle retninger. Hvis hesten ikke vil det samme som rytteren, stiver den sig, og det går udover gangarten og præstationen. Rytterens indvirkninger skal påvirke hestens ben for at få dens opmærksomhed og respekt. God opførsel skal gøres let og forkeret gøres krævende.

Gangart

I grunduddannelsen skal man huske Tempo - Retning - Gangart. Det skal forstås på den måde, at det er svært at opnå kontrol over gangarten uden først at have kontrol over tempo og retning. For at udvikle taktfaste, regelmæssige gangarter skal hesten være rolig, løsgjort og fremadtænkende. Hvis hesten svarer godt på rytterens indvirkninger, og rytteren har kontrol over hestens kropsdele, kan rytteren hjælpe hesten med at finde gangarten. Videreudvikling af en gangart er afhængig af hestens kropsholdning og balance.

Bøjning

Sidebevægelse - Bøjning - Løsgjort rygsgøjle: Det er nødvendigt at kunne flytte hesten til siden for at skabe bøjning. Det er mest vigtigt for hestens stive side, men også for heste, som mangler løsgjorthed. Bøjning gør, at musklerne i hestens udvendige side strækkes, og det får hesten til at søge frem og ned med halsen. Løsgjort rygsgøjle er en forudsætning for gode gangarter og bedre balance.

Det er på volten, at arbejdet med hestens samling begynder. Det indvendige bagben træder ind under hesten. Arbejdet med bøjningen fortsætter i versaden, hvor hesten også sætter indvendig bagben ind under tyngdepunktet. Bøjningen er også til stede i traversaden og renversaden, men der er det hestens udvendige bagben, som skal træde til tyngdepunktet. Disse øvelser udvikler musklerne i hestens bagpart og er derfor væsentlige for højere uddannelsesniveau. Man må ikke bede om for meget på tidlige stadier. Opbyg hestens styrke, smidighed og tillid. Sidebevægelser gør samling mere opnåelig.

Ligeudrettet

Ligeudrettet er altafgørende, hvorimod skævhed er i vejen for alt! Alle heste er født med en naturlig skævhed.

Skævhed giver stress og spændinger, der påvirker forskellige heste på forskellige måder. Skævhed har en negativ indflydelse på gangarten, og samling er ikke mulig, hvis hesten er skæv.

Den mest almindelige skævhed i islandske heste er, at vægten falder diagonalt fra venstre bagben til højre skulder og forben. Det gør, at hesten er lettere at bøje på den venstre side og mere stiv på sin højre side. Det er lettere at flytte forparten til højre end til venstre, og det er lettere at flytte bagparten til venstre end til højre. Træningen på højre og venstre volte er derfor forskellig.

Versade er nødvendig for ligeudrettelsen, men den skal tilpasses hestens medfødte skævhed. Hesten aflaster gerne bagbenet på den bløde side. Det er vigtigt at gøre det bagben stærkere for, at hesten kommer til at bære lige med begge bagben.

”Den stive side og den vanskelige side” skrev Gustav Steinbrecht’s i sin berømte bog ”Gymnasium des Pferdes”. Der er træningsmæssige opgaver i begge sider, men de er meget forskellige. Det er derfor forkeret at tale om en god side og en dårlig side.

Når hesten bærer samme vægt med venstre og højre side, er den ligeudrettet.

Form

Form er et begreb, som omhandler hestens brug af hele kroppen.

Hesten har en lang hals, der har stor indflydelse på formen og balancen. Hvis halsen er spændt, stiv eller kort, over biddet eller under biddet har det negativ effekt på balancen. Hvis hesten har spændinger i nakken eller halsen er rygsgøjlen ikke løsgjort. Løsgjort

rygsgøjle er forudsætningen for at øge hestens bæring og derigennem forbedre bevægelserne. Frihed og løsgjorthed opnås ved at slippe muskelspændinger. At ride hesten ”fremad og nedad” er en vigtig fase. Rytteren skal fokusere på, at hestens pande kommer fremad, og at hesten gør mest muligt ud af sin hals. Hestens bøjning har stor indflydelse, når rytteren ønsker at forlænge halsen fremad og nedad.

Det er vigtigt at forstå, at lavere form skaber evnen til at opnå mere samlet og højere form senere. Rytteren skal kunne variere halsens position efter opgaven og altid være i stand til at strække halsen frem og ned.

Når hesten har løsgjort rygsgøjle bliver det muligt at øge aktiviteten i hans bagpart. Aktivitet i hestens bagpart er vigtig for takt, fjedring og bevægelse. Det er forkert at øge aktiviteten i en hest som ikke har løsgjort rygsgøjle - det leder til stivhed.

Glad

Et forhold mellem hest og rytter bygger på kommunikation og tillid, hvilket leder til harmoni i sind og bevægelse.

Rytteren skal altid være på udikig efter en mulighed for at belønne hestens indsats. Det vil motivere hesten til at gøre mere. Belønningen er den vanskelige kunst at gøre ingenting på det rette tidspunkt.

Det er vigtigt at undgå at bruge modstridende indvirkninger. Det er muligt at køre en bil med håndbremsen trukket, men resultatet vil aldrig være godt. Hvis de drivende og anholdende indvirkninger er brugt samtidig, bliver hesten indelukket, klaustrofobisk, stiv og spændt eller lukker af og går ind i sig selv. Modstridige signaler forvirrer hesten, og gør hestens respons til indvirkningen dårligere. For at hesten kan være glad og villig, skal den forstå, hvad der kræves af den. Hesten skal have den holdning og balance, som opgaven kræver.

Træneren skal give hesten bestemte valgmuligheder, der leder til, at hesten selv finder den mulighed, som træneren har planlagt. Hesten tager beslutningen, den bliver glad og får selvtillid.

Glade heste performer bedre.

Balance

Hestens naturlige balance er ca. 60% på forbenene og 40% på bagbenene. Rytterens vægt belaster forparten mere end bagparten - hesten er på forparten.

Samling er den balance af hesten, hvor forparten aflastes, og belastningen overføres til en aktiveret bagpart. Samling er den balance, der giver en hest maksimal mobilitet.

Hesten samles, når den bringer sine bagben fremad ind under tyngdepunktet ved at vinkle bagparten og ved, at tyngdepunktet føres tilbage over på bagbenene.

Samling er vigtig for hestens holdbarhed, fordi hesten lærer at bære rytteren med sine bagben. En kort hals bidrager ikke til samling. Fak-

tisk forhindrer det god balance, da det komprimerer rygsgøjlen, og gør bevægelsen af bagbenene vanskeligere.

Arbejdet med at forbedre hestens balance starter på volten, hvor hesten træder under tyngdepunktet med det indvendige bagben. Dette arbejde fortsætter med versade, traversade, renversade og bagparts vending.

Rytteren kan ikke tvinge hesten til samling. Det kræver systematisk uddannelse, gymnastik og styrketræning af bagparten for at gøre hesten i stand til det.

Tilbagetrædning er en vigtig øvelse, hvor hesten lærer at flytte vægten til bagbenene. Det er også en øvelse, som forbereder hesten til overgange. Overgange er alle skift fra én gangart til en anden. Overgange til og fra parade. Overgange til og fra en øvelse og sidst, men ikke mindst, overgange fra et tempo til et andet tempo i samme gangart. I overgange må drivende og anholdende hjælpere ikke modsige hinanden.

Korrekt udførte overgange er en vigtig øvelse for hestens opmærksomhed, energi, smidighed og lydighed. Igennem overgange finder hesten bedre balance - overgange er samlen- de arbejde.

Energi

Der er ingen præstation uden energi. Når det lykkes for rytteren at kombinere energi med smidighed, lydighed og korrekt kropsholdning, går hesten godt.

Det er vigtigt for rytteren at have kontrol over hestens energi. Rytteren skal kunne øge og mindske energien efter behov. Hvis hesten tvinges til konstant at gå med max energi, så bliver den stresset, stiv og spændt. Det vil gå ud over helbredet og kvaliteten af gangarten. Hvis hesten er stresset, skal den rides på løse tøjler, hvor rytteren skal få kontrol og afslapning igennem bøjning med en tøjle.

Energi trænes igennem skarpe overgange. Rytteren belønner hesten for at flytte sine ben lettere og hurtigere. Det er benenes reaktion, men ikke farten på hesten, som belønnes. Kor- te hurtige sprint i højt tempo kan også være med til at øge hestens energi.

En god træner ved, hvor meget han kan kræve af hesten, og han ved også, hvornår han skal holde op. Man skal finde ud af, hvor hestens grænse er, og tage den til grænsen, men ikke over.

Hvis man kører en bil op på det røde felt på omdrejningstalleren, vil man skade motoren.

Tölt is the product of posture and balance.

Jóhann Rúnar Skúlason and Hnokki frá Fellskoti



Man skal aldrig nogensinde tage en hest op på det røde felt. Dette niveau af stress kan forårsage uoprettelige skader på hestens psyke. Rytteren skal bestemme, hvor den røde line linje er på hver hest, han arbejder med. En god rytter kan mærke det i hestens nerver og reaktioner.

Konkurrencehesten skal være modig, selv-sikker og overbevist om, at den kan klare opgaven.

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- Man skal kunne styre hver del, før man kan styre helheden.

- Rytterens indvirkninger skal påvirke hestens ben for at få dens opmærksomhed og respekt.

- Ligeudrettet er alt, skævhed er i vejen for alt!

- Lang løsgjort hals er vigtig for hestens velbefindende og balance.

- Belønningen er den vanskelige kunst at gøre ingenting på det rette tidspunkt.

- Glade heste performer bedre.

- Overgange er samlende arbejde.