

Note: As the translator of German horse- and riding-related language and in order to be more true to the exact meaning of the author's content, at times, I have taken the liberty to translate words and phrases in a more literal sense than with regard to a smoother style or correct grammar.

The 'Subtle Crop'

By Franz Martin Stankus

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A horse has to learn to understand the crop in the context of many different applications. The same goes for the spurs and the whip. Therefore we need to dose these types of aids with great care. Taking a closer look at



this statement, this means that the use of the crop helps us to explain to a young horse what the driving leg means. One must not assume that the horse by nature understands the forward driving leg as a forward driving aid. One must not assume that!

The horse was not made so that we can sit on him and ride around on him. He has to learn this. One part of this

learning experience is the connection with the driving leg. The second part is to say to the horse 'now you have to go forward.' This is the job of the 'subtle crop.' When I follow this concept and take it to the extreme where a horse should not just go forward but should learn to lower his haunches, to become cadenced, then the crop takes on the task of letting the horse know to come back more, to sit down, to bend the structure of the hind extremities, to lower his hind end. These are different applications a horse needs to learn in order to understand the function of the crop.

There are other applications, for example to make the horse pay attention. This is quite a different aid with the crop than riding forward. The dosing of the crop aid depends on the art of using the crop responsibly. When on occasion of a horse show I stand on the side of a warm-up arena and watch I have to realize that some riders have no limit at all. They bang around on their horses. Their vexation about something not working quite right is being transferred to the horse via the crop. This cannot be! I cannot punish a horse for a messed-up situation. In this case the use of the crop

serves as an outlet for the rider's anger. This requires a completely different approach. This is not the purpose of the aids!

There are five riding aids. The whole concept of dressage -- from amateur riding, training level and up to Grand Prix -- is based on these five aids. In principle a training level rider has the same aid system available to communicate with her horse as a Grand Prix rider. Combined and varied these five aids result in endless possible variations.

Riding Aids				
Leg Aids	Weight Aids	Rein Aids	Crop Aids Spur Aids	Voice Aids
Forward driving leg	Bilateral weight aids	Taking rein aids		
Sideways driving leg	Unilateral weight aids	Releasing rein aids		
Stabilizing, steadying, holding leg	Increasing/ decreasing weight aids	Steadying rein aids		
		Lateral rein aids		

When we start with the education of a horse we begin to explain to him what the individual aids mean. We consciously influence the horse.

Therefore, when we ride we must adjust what goes on in our head. Nothing is worse than getting on a horse with troubled or negative thoughts. We might as well stay on the ground because riding cannot work this way. This is what is meant when we talk about the term 'influence.' Influence is not just about the giving of the above mentioned aids, but also about the feeling of a horse, about the process of movement, about the rhythm of a horse. All of this is 'influence.' As a rider I have to take care that my own body is relaxed. This can be learned. Horses are very sensitive. They immediately react to the rider's tenseness. A typical example can be observed when a well-versed rider sits on a horse for the first time and the owner can hardly recognize

his own horse. It may be that this rider 'influences' the horse differently. He has a different 'in-fluence' on the horse. The word expresses very nicely how literally 'something flows into' something else. This is how one can explain the meaning of 'influence.' It is my wish to advise readers that we need to think about these things. It is not just about sitting on top of a horse, taking up the reins and riding on. We want to deepen our riding, we want to connect more closely with the horse. Horse and rider must build a unit. Everybody hears: You must be one with your horse.

But what does that mean? Here I come back to one of my key experiences: As a young rider I was yelled at 'Stay seated!' But how was I supposed to stay seated when I wasn't told HOW? In those days the tone was pretty aggressive: 'Head up! Stay straight! Stay seated!' without any further explanation. I didn't learn to ride during my apprenticeship as a young rider. Sure, I went through the educational process, did well in my exam, but my understanding of riding only began when I came to work with a true master teacher, Egon von Neindorf, who could explain all these things to me.

Following the exploration of the theme 'influence' many things became more transparent to me on a personal level. Along the motto of 'How do I tell my child?' I have to put a certain feeling into words to provide a plausible explanation that can be understood by my student. It is so hard to explain feelings. For this task I have to know myself very well. This is the problem! These feelings are so subtle they are hard to put into precise words. As long as I have ridden I have always felt beautiful moments when I think spontaneously 'How would I explain this sensation that I am feeling and enjoying right now to a student?' This is why I come up with certain terms for my training, to tell the student how I sense something, so he can follow the feeling, comprehend it, follow the riding sensation. When, for example, I want to tell a student to sit more (deeply) 'into' the horse, I may say 'you'll have to feel as if your middle posture slides into the horse's shoulder.' So, when one sits on the horse, one has the horse's shoulders and withers in front, one has to try to move one's middle toward the shoulder of the horse so that one can sit (more deeply) 'into the horse.' One has to try these things out, practice and practice until the feeling starts to set in.

The riding guidelines only serve us as an orientation, just like the scale of notes in music. These guidelines are very important, everyone should follow them. I do, too. But there is 'left and right' of the guidelines which oftentimes is more important. About this the guidelines do not say enough. It is therefore my feeling that we need to talk more about these things. A lot is being written about the guidelines. You can find various literature in the book shelf about riding in general, about a better seat, about riding from the core, and the list goes on. There are endless numbers of specialty books out there. A guideline is a special competence in one's head. While riding I must live and revive these riding guidelines. I am allowed to use them to compose, and my instrument, the most precious possession I have, is my horse. Otherwise everything stays theory while I ride my horse. Thus the art of riding consists of the use of the five riding aids to connect the horse with me, to 'go into' the horse with influence. For this purpose we have endless possibilities to vary the riding aids. They are not a static system. It is a wonderfully virtuous system. Not a system to reign, to violate, to oppress, to allocate guilt. It is a guiding system to 'being carried' in one of the most wonderful ways in the world. A dance with the horse. That is what riding means to me.

Yours truly,

Franz-Martin Stankus