

Got Seat?

Kip seeks a more elegant, balanced, effective position.

BY KIP GOLDREYER

ILLUSTRATION BY ©DEBBIE PALEN

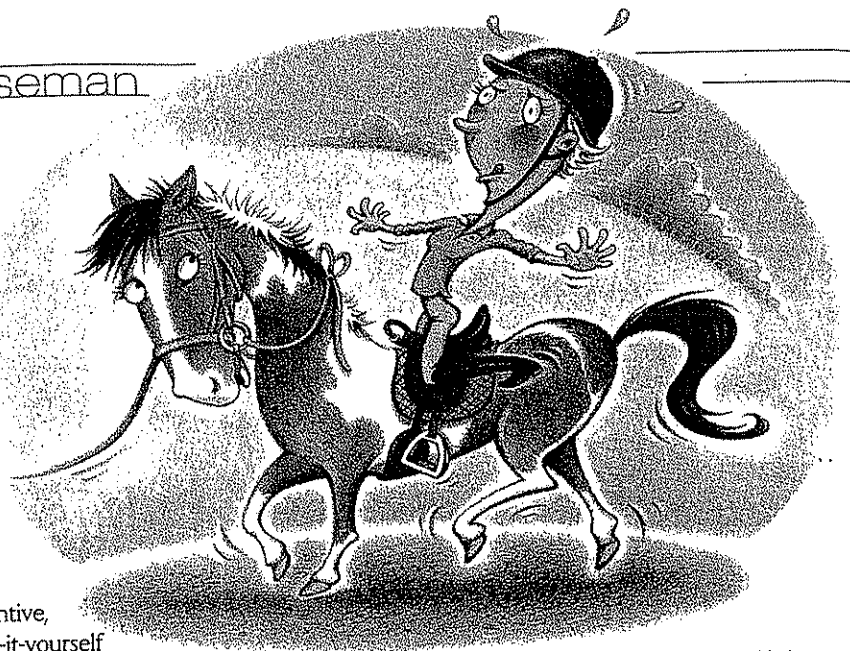
To work on your seat, you need to be on the longe. The world-famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria, requires its students to do two years of longe lessons before they're allowed to ride the famous Lipizzaner schoolmasters.

Why don't we require such work here? Some people cite the independent streak we inherited from our Founding Fathers. Positive spinners allude to our

inventive, do-it-yourself nature; negative spinners mutter about our insatiable need for instant gratification.

I take the practical middle-of-the-road view that there is longeing and then there is *longeing*. Just as the Spanish Riding School offers droves of schoolmasters to its aspiring students (which we

don't), it offers legions of expert longeurs. Here, on the other hand, I'm sure you've seen—and possibly been the victim of—longe lessons that are not only counterproductive but potentially dangerous. I know I've endured such sessions, body in a head-to-toe



isometric contraction of terror, horse careening around on his inside shoulder like a motorcycle, as the well-meaning person handling the longe tells me to relax, sit up, sit down, drop my stirrups, let go of the bucking strap, and make big, suicidal circles with my arms!

From a rider's perspective, what is even worse than risking my neck in such a session is that it accomplishes nothing. "Practice makes perfect" is the old saying, but the truth is that "what you practice, you perfect." And if you practice a tense, off-kilter, incorrect seat, guess what you're going to end up with? (Hint: It won't be the Guenter Seidel look.)

That's why I was encouraged to hear that well-known clinician Erica Poseley was coming to town. During the thirty-six years that Erica's been doing dressage, she studied dressage training and rider biomechanics with Dietrich von Hopfgarten, J. Ashton Moore, Elizabeth Searle, David Hunt, and Sandy Howard. She developed teaching and communi-

cation skills with bodywork guru Mary Wanless. Best of all, she learned classical longeing techniques from legendary German trainer Egon von Neindorff. Today, she synthesizes these experiences by teaching a deep seat and a secure, effective position on the longe. I signed up for all three days.

On day 1, Erica had me walk and trot, rising and sitting, in both directions—what's known in pedagogical circles as "giving you enough rope to hang yourself." Here's what dangled from the noose: I sat in a teeny bit of a chair seat, with my heels jammed down and my legs a little out in front of me. "If your horse were to magically disappear from under you right now," Erica said, "you wouldn't land standing—you'd land on your butt. But don't feel bad. Most dressage riders do the same thing. And they end up hanging on their horses' mouths. They hollow the horses' backs, stiffen them in front, push them onto their forehands..." I'll spare you the rest of

the painful litany.

At the halt, Erica shortened my stirrups a hole to create more bend in my hip, knee, and ankle angles. She had me knot my reins. She had me skoonch a bit forward in the saddle and sit upright to create a "neutral spine," with my seat bones pointing straight down. She pulled my leg away from the saddle, rotated it, and repositioned it so my knee was bent, deep, and pointing groundward. The inside of my thigh was on the saddle, my lower leg was back—"your heel to his hock," she was destined to repeat a million times—my toe was in, and my heel was out. "Tighten behind your knee and lift your toe—instead of dropping your heel, which makes you jam your lower leg and shove it forward. Just rest your foot, and don't push down."

Push down? Push anywhere while my muscle memory was having conniption fits?

As I tried to maintain this seat and leg, Erica had me hold my arms out to

PS,
GS
ative.

S

sUS.com

BOOT
ENCE
TYLE.

mer version. Fully lined

n calfskin lining • Rear
rgundy, Green, Mocca.



DE RIDING BOOTS

the sides at shoulder level, then bring them back together behind my back to pull my shoulder blades toward each other. Then shoulders down, elbows down, "waaay down and in front of your body," hands pushed out in front, thumbs up. With what little reserve I had left, I engaged my core by pulling my belly button in as I pushed out with everything around it.

Out on the longe, Tucker walked and I went along, a major accomplishment, with my elbows sneaking akimbo in body-English sympathy for my heels, my left instep SCREAMING that it didn't LIKE lifting my toe and my heel taking an instant and profound dislike to Tucker's hock. Several times around in both directions, and we were done!

It's amazing how fast forty-five minutes can fly by when you're in sheer agony.

The next day, Erica shortened my stirrups another hole (proving that an inch CAN feel like a mile) and put us out on the longe at the posting trot. I lightly held my bucking strap with my outside hand and put my inside hand on my hip so I could feel it opening (extending) and closing (flexing) in a forward-and-back motion that I imagined as a kind of upside-down pendulum. This went very well indeed: well enough that Tucker was bouncing happily along, even responding by lengthening his stride when I stayed UP a little longer in the "extension" phase and shortening when I stayed DOWN a little longer in the "flexion" phase.

We then tried a little sitting trot while I held the bucking strap with my inside hand and reached down behind the saddle to "pat, pat, pat, pat" with my outside hand in time to Tucker's trot rhythm. This was supposed to help my hip bend into a good flex—but I was instead getting twisted and crooked. Erica was undaunted. "Not everything works for everybody. Tomorrow you'll try punching instead."

Punching?

The third day, we ran a quick check of my position, then went immediately to posting trot, again focusing on heel to hock (my new mantra), knee down, rise forward off the thigh, sit—don't thump—into the saddle. I held the bucking strap with both hands. I felt my hip angle with my inside hand. I stuck both arms straight out in front as if I were trying to reach something I couldn't quite get to. I increased and decreased Tucker's step. I dropped my stirrups and, keeping my leg in riding position (urf), I posted.

When we went to sitting trot, Erica had me stick my arms straight out in front and PUNCH the air as if it were a punching bag, alternating my fists in time to Tucker's trot. Punch, punch, punch, punch ... I must be a closet pugilist, because this one worked! I didn't tense, I didn't twist, I didn't try to hold on, and I tuned in immediately to the subtle but evident opening and closing of my hip angle.

Finally, Erica had me drop my stirrups and raise and lower my knees, again in time to Tucker's trot but with a clear emphasis on the lift. It was UP, down (with no thrust or jamming down, and only to riding position and no lower), UP, down, UP, down, as I once again got the feel and timing of opening and closing my hip. I found that I also settled more onto my neutral seat bones—and so sat down around my pony.

Was all this bodily commotion—on the longe, yet—distressing to Tucker (who, as far as I knew, had never even been in a lesson situation in his life)? If so, you'd never know it. He listened, he obeyed, he bounced happily along with his back up and round, in a jaunty little rhythm.

And with that, we were done.

"When I come back," said Erica, as she undid Tucker's side reins, "you'll do these knee lifts while you're 'climbing a rope' with your hands. That's when you know you're starting to get good."

I can hardly wait! **HH**

2006 Kentucky Michael Ma

World Cl Michael Triumphs A

2006 KENTUCKY DERE

Hall of Fame Trainer
Grand Prix Show Jn



"I have been using U-7 GASTRIC AID for over 5 years now. We've had our horse scoped, we had no ulcers and I like that it costs 1/10th what Gastroguard[®] does."

GUARANTEED TO WORK
OR YOUR MONEY
BACK!



©2006 Finish Line Horse Products, Inc. All rights reserved.
Gastroguard is a registered trademark of Merck.

CODE: PHSep-25