

Please note: This text is the English translation of the answer of the German Equestrian Federation (FN) to the letter Philippe Karl sent on 27 March 2009. The original German version of this text, including the letterhead etc., can be found at <http://www.philippe-karl.com/534/>

Please note too that this translation contains some expressions of the German riding vocabulary which do not have any direct equivalent in English. They have been translated as literally as possible while trying to render the German meaning in the most precise way.

Deutsche Reiterliche Vereinigung, 48229 Warendorf

15.06.2009

Dear Mr. Karl,

Thank you for your letter with its propositions for changes to our “rules”.

The system of rules regulating the riding competition in Germany, of which the German Equestrian Federation and its under-organisations are responsible, is the “Leistungs-Prüfungs-Ordnung” (LPO, Regulations for the performance tests). These regulations are revised every four years by corresponding expert committees, who are always happy to receive practical proposals, discuss them and when indicated, take them into consideration.

However, your “concrete propositions for the rules” can be integrated only partially into our regulations. For instance, the LPO does not contain any detailed specifications on the scoring, as you call for in some of your points. The performance tests are judged on the basis of the « Richtlinien für Reiten und Fahren » (Principles of riding and driving). We attach great importance to the fact that as experts of the matter, our competition judges should form a comprehensive and global opinion based on the “Richtlinien”. The scoring system used in our competitions reveals for the greatest part very clearly which horses are well and correctly ridden and which are not. But we do also know that in the training courses for judges, we have to point out again and again when performances cannot be rated with a good or satisfying score due to insufficiencies in the main points of the “Skala der Ausbildung” (Training scale). In the end, the scores show that only few riders perform well, very well or even excellently. Otherwise judges would give more marks between 8 and 10. So: even winning performances sometimes have shortcomings. The judges document this by means of their marks!

You furthermore write that the official riding has changed dramatically in the past 30 years. If by this you mean the classical riding system, which forms the basis of the German and international riding competition, we have to contradict you distinctly. The riding system in effect till today – as it is described in the “Richtlinien für Reiten und Fahren” – is based on the 1912 Manual of the German cavalry (“Heeresdienstvorschrift”) and has essentially been subjected to an optical and linguistic overhaul. Its principles, which even at the time were geared to the wellbeing of the horse, remain unchanged to this day.

Maybe today it is indeed being interpreted somewhat generously in some parts of elite sport. This is something we have to deal with on the national and international level. And this is indeed being done! We are very well aware too that the classical riding system is not always –

and not by everybody – put into practice like we would wish it. In all riding disciplines and on each level, classical riding is sometimes put into practice in a wrong way – often not intentionally, but out of incapacity.

One way to put it into practice which in our view is wrong, is the elevation of the horse created by a clear action of the hands, as you propagate it in your riding system and as we could observe for ourselves during your presentation at the Equitana horse fair. Such a riding nearly always goes at the expense of the activity of the back and therefore also of the relaxedness and the health of the horse.

Finally, we would like to shortly comment on your nine propositions. First of all, we wish to point out that some of the points you mention have been part of our regulations for years:

1. When used properly, auxiliary reins do not automatically have a negative effect. They are called auxiliary reins because they can be helpful during certain phases of the schooling of horses and riders. We too do lastingly reject auxiliary reins that are fixed too short or draw reins used to overflex the horse. In any case, they are not allowed in the performance tests. Using a cavesson can also be very reasonable in the schooling work, especially with young horses. However, we do not see any compelling reason for allowing longeing to be done on the cavesson only. A sensitive longeing person and correctly fixed auxiliary reins are of course an essential precondition. This is why we have introduced a longeing exam (« Longierabzeichen ») and an additional volume of the “Richtlinien”.

2. Nosebands that are too tight have always been rejected and are forbidden in competition. To deal with this problem, there are the so-called horse controls – around 55 000 a year – in our competitions, which could certainly be carried out even more intensely and more often.

3. Of course, these controls also include the checking of the horse’s mouth and ...

4. ... of the whole skin of the horse, especially at the location of the spurs.

5. The nose slightly in front of the vertical, with a long enough neck and the poll at the highest point, the horse in self-carriage, is and remains the goal to be aimed for! However, the connection between the hand of the rider and the mouth of the horse is not the only important thing. Other preconditions are also the active push-off of the hind legs and the supple swinging through the back into the hand of the rider (« das losgelassene Schwingen über den Rücken an die Hand des Reiters heran »). It is decisive that the horse should seek the bit, that it should be in front of the rider and sensitive to his driving aids. From our point of view, a correct contact (« Anlehnung ») and self-carriage can thus not be judged only by the fact that the nose remains in front of the vertical.

In the dynamics of the motion, even a horse ridden with a smooth contact can sometimes happen to come slightly behind the vertical. Though the clear overflexion of the horse is a problem to take seriously, the fact that the horse occasionally comes behind the vertical has to be viewed in a more differentiated way. If for instance a horse “drops a bit the neck” from the withers and the rider does not yield quickly enough, the horse automatically comes behind the vertical, even without the rider acting backwards with his hand. On the other hand, a horse which moves with a long neck and the poll at the highest point is not automatically relaxed and content! Most of the time, an elevation of the neck that is actively created by the hand goes at the expense of the activity of the back and therefore also of the relaxedness.

Oversimplification and black-and-white-portrayal thus do not help here.

6. The outward signs of a deficiency in relaxedness are of course judged in a negative way. But here too, the important thing is to evaluate the motion of the horse as a whole.

7. To require the extension of the neck, or as we say it, « das Zügel aus der Hand kauen lassen » (literally: to let the horse chew the reins out of the hand) in all the tests is a good suggestion, which has so far been implemented only in parts. At present, it is required in basic and more advanced tests and in the tests in which only the riders are evaluated (« Dressurreiterprüfungen »).

8. We have long been pleading within the international committees for a clear valorisation of the walk by means of corresponding coefficients. Here too, you only pick one symptom which according to your proposition would influence the scores disproportionately.

9. This point can be put into practice in the performance tests only, not in the auctions. This requirement too is comprehensible. In the presentations for young horses, for instance at the national championships for 3- and 4-year-old horses, many things have already changed for the better these last years. In the coming years, we will put the young horse even more in the centre of interest.

These past years, we have experienced that not only the rules, but above all the discussion with the riders and trainers on the spot lead to a better comprehension, which in turn benefits the horses.

We nevertheless thank you for your propositions.

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