

**I'm making Will Sander's book "Baroque and Academic Training Concepts" a standard reading for my apprentices. I find it to be very complete and very understandable.**

*Jamie Drizin, professional rider and trainer*

**"I did read your book last night and I enjoyed it very much ! Thank you again also for this valuable book." Yours, Dieter**

*Dieter Rihs, former Olympic rider, great horseman, eventer, and Production Director from the all-equestrian show APASSIONATA*

Dear Master Sanders,

I am having something akin to a spiritual revelation as I read your book. I seem to have been born to this and hope that my journey will prove that I am one of the chosen few.

My addiction to horses started when I was about 5 and saw my first horse up close and that was that. My first lessons, for 3 years, 3 x/week for 5 weeks spring, summer, and fall were in a double bridle, but true to Americanized riding, when one day my horse fell and broke the snaffle rein, my instructor put me on her horse as she didn't want me riding just off the curb. I didn't know if I was lucky to ride Dark or if I was being lightly chastised for being only able to handle 4 reins instead of two? My very first lesson though, which set the stage for my life with horses, involved my horse Amos shying directly sideways from a rabbit. My gut reaction was to sooth him. I was only 8, there was no reason to fear. In those years I didn't learn much about all aspects of horsemanship, I just wanted to ride, enjoy the horse, and not get into too much trouble.

By the time I was 8, and thanks to a baby-sitter that was an art major and also crazy about horses, I was quite accurate in my sketching and pencilled drawings of horses (mostly in the margins of what was supposed to be my school homework) and focused on getting the muscles, the attitude, the form and expression as fine as possible and I think that is where my observations of conformation and movement started. Fast forward 20 years and my long time friend Mouse, an Anglo Arab that was not 7 (as told) but 2 or 3 when I got her. She was very upside-down in build, ewe necked, hollow back, nasty trot, but ever so willing. I'd gotten over the can't ride in a curb idea with my first horse a few years prior, and my second horse that was a TWH. Mouse was green as the grass but really happy to be ridden and to please me. I stuck a grazing bit on her and figured that if I am kind with it and ride off my seat and let her carry that bit with some reminders I can get that neck to develop its arch, it worked, took some years as I was doing this off the cuff with no instruction and my interest was trail riding. But before that, she had a problem with getting her tongue over the bit - one of the rare times I used a snaffle, being told "she's green, better use a snaffle," so I reckon it was me she was evading, maybe not. I got a mullen mouth for her and no more tongue issues - took 3 rides. Switched back to her snaffle which she then politely told me she HATED, and that is right when I decided to go for a curb to help her neck and we were both happy.

Starting with my first horse, and with each horse since, I immediately strive for whoa on the exhale - reading about the breathing brought tears to my eyes as it's something that when I focus or need to, the breathing happens in a search for synchronization. It's a start. Mouse also taught me that the normal idea of circling a snotty horse was not going to work and she responded to shoulder-ins! Well, I had no idea at the time that is what we were doing, but going laterally sure helped her attitude when she got full of snot.

Bits for relaxation...again, Mouse. She went through a period of tension that I felt was mental and not going to be "trained" away. After some thought I got her a big fat ugly Salinas bit, huge spoon with a roller, but with rein slots for both reins. This calmed her instantly on trail, and I started experimenting with rein vibrations to further lighten her - yes even with that crass looking bit. The roller I think satisfied something for her, and I was forced to be better again with my hands as that bit could obviously do a lot of damage if used harshly.

The Counted Walk. Now some time back I was reflecting on the idea that predators tend to a diagonal walk and prey animals towards the lateral walk. BUT some horses exhibit a more diagonal, and some a more lateral, mostly within the gaited vs trotting context, but there are variations in each breed to some extent. I remember some years back seeing a piece on PBS on the Queen's horses, and as one was walked past she commented "listen to the perfect cadence, that only comes from a [balanced well made] horse" and with a pastoral smile and half closed eyes she counted that walk. That started my brain on using movement, sight and sound of it, to tell where a horse is lacking, tense, sore, etc, and as a farrier I've tried to listen to heel first vs toe first steps. Heavier on the fore vs the hind that sort of thing. Reading about the Counted Walk and with this in mind, I can't help but think that taking a horse, a prey animal, to this diagonal way, is somehow mentally empowering to the horse!

Much more. It seems that in almost every paragraph is an ideal that I say YES to as I've either touched on it or unwittingly employed, or have had in my head as basic philosophy regarding horses and/or Paso Finos. It's as if I have a lot of the dots and now they need to get connected in order to make the picture. More dots on the horizon!

I have so often been frustrated by the lack of time in the past many years that I have had to spend with my kids, but the end result is that I have one very clean slate in my gelding and one not too messed up one in my mare (both of which, I may brag, are purposely bred to be FULLY gaited and can fino to largo, though not yet with the finesse that we are going to strive for) Rio is much more relaxed about fino, Cascabel pretty much has to be a bit annoyed to fino and has done it almost out of spite a few times, being barn sour - for which she was rewarded with release of the rein and she stayed true. Love that mare. I haven't asked for it yet from either. Rio had done it at liberty and seems to need a barrier to blast past mentally... taking note of that. But I am now seeing that God has held me back intentionally with the various roadblocks and now has me in a place where I can go forward freely and the blessing is that I have a few horses that aren't full of too many mistakes to fix.

I'm relating all this also as a tribute. My mother passed away this past spring, we had an absolutely dreadful relationship that was reconciled shortly before she passed. She was one of my roadblocks, with her unswerving dedication to interrupting me at something she felt was in competition to her own way of doing things. However, she did believe in using dressage with her pasos, studied with Helena Clifford for a few years though not to any high degree, and would be eating up your program with a ferocity only she possessed had it been available before she quit riding. It's with happy tears that I can look up and say "Mom, I'm going to do this, I wish you could be here for it". So you see, this is also a healing journey for me. I had to share this with you as I am so excited I can't keep it in. You are seeking students that are devoted to this way with horses and doing it with Paso Finos, well put me on that list.

Back to the Counted Walk - we have a horse here, the one with TMJ. I have a question. One gal that was here and doing a sort of evaluation of her due to obvious pain issues noted that when she manually flexed Jodi's poll even just a hair, her whole back moved (flex down and her back rose, to the right and her back moved to the left) and she thought that was a bad thing. I am now not so sure I agree, but want to hear what you have to say about it. There were a few local spasms in her painful areas, but for the most part, I kind of saw this as a suppleness and connected back. Her experience is a few months of driving training a few years back and this spring a few months of ridden (her back made it impossible I think for her trainer to properly fit a saddle and there are still remnants of that pain in her). I'm thinking the TMJ is just a float gone bad and it's a different dentist that will be seeing her.

Thank you so much for your time, I hope this isn't presuming too much on your generosity.

**Coreen**