

DRESSAGE TODAY

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EXTRA

9 Training
Tips from
Dorothee Schneider

**Understanding
Stifle Stressors**

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9 Tips from Dorothee Schneider

Inside the 2019 New England Dressage Association Symposium

BY LINDSAY PAULSEN

Dressage enthusiasts wrapped in stadium blankets, clutching hot drinks and notebooks looked on as Germany's two-time Olympian Dorothee Schneider and her selected horse-and-rider combinations brought the time-tested training system of her homeland to life before their eyes.

Schneider was the latest headliner to make the trek overseas to share her wisdom with this eager, engaged audience at the annual New England Dressage Association symposium. Past events have set a high bar, spotlighting clinicians such as Great Britain's Carl Hester and Charlotte Dujardin and Fin-

land's Kyra Kyrklund. This year at Mount Holyoke Equestrian Center in South Hadley, Massachusetts, was no exception.

Schneider opened the event, held in October as the region's foliage bursted with the amber and crimson hues of autumn, by giving an overview of her approach to training. While



ABOUT THE NEW ENGLAND DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION

The New England Dressage Association aims to promote the art and sport of dressage. The beginnings of NEDA were born from a trip that several riders took to watch the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City and returned home wanting to learn more about the sport. This group began to host informal clinics, practice test rides and small shows. It was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in Massachusetts in 1972.

Since then, NEDA has gained more than 1,800 members and education remains a centerpiece of the organization. NEDA has hosted top clinicians from across the globe, including Ulla Salzgeber, Steffen and Shannon Peters, Klaus Balkenhol, Debbie McDonald and more. At their symposia over the years, tickets have sold out and audience numbers have soared over 900—with members traveling from as far as Ireland to attend. NEDA also hosts multiple competitions throughout the year, one of which is the Fall Festival and includes an FEI Dressage World Cup™ qualifier.



CAROLE MACDONALD

knowledgeable dressage fans quickly realized that there was—not coincidentally—a strong emphasis on the elements of the Training Scale, Schneider also emphasized that you, as the rider, must have the feeling for the individual horse you sit on. In her training, she focuses on creating happy horses who are willing partners and confident in their jobs. Part of this, she reminded auditors, is providing them with plenty of reassurance and reward in the arena. Outside of the arena, you must allow them to live a lifestyle that promotes their wellbeing. Horses need to go out in the field and paddock every day, to spend time in the sun and move on their own, she said. Following are more tips from Schneider that are applicable for horses and riders of all levels.

1 **Make your horse feel proud of his work.** “Give your horse positive feedback so he can be motivated to do the next step, feeling proud of himself and like he is doing something well—so he feels happy to do this with us,”

► Germany’s Dorothee Schneider headlined this year’s NEDA Symposium.



LINDSAY PAULSEN



CAROL E. MACDONALD

▲ During the Third Level session, Alice Tarjan rides Hester, a 7-year-old Dutch Warmblood mare

Schneider reminded the riders.

She frequently encouraged them to pat their horses to reassure them and “stabilize the mental situation.” This applied to young horses who were balking at the audience and, alternatively, more experienced horses who were overmotivated and needed to be calmed. For example, Alice Tarjan’s Third Level mare, Hester, showed sensational movement and significant talent for piaffe and passage, which she offered even at moments when it wasn’t necessarily desired. “Alice’s horse is spectacular, but she needs calmness to be more with her rider,” Schneider explained.

said. This is natural and inevitable. Riding on the second track also helps you be more aware of this. The strong side is the side on which the horse has more difficulty bending and flexing his own body. On the opposite is the hollow side, where the horse bends and flexes by himself (natural crookedness) to the inside—therefore it’s more difficult to turn the horse because you easily lose control of the outside shoulder.

4 Remember to feel the rhythm. Every horse has a particular rhythm in which it is easiest for them to swing in the gaits and find the contact to both reins. It is your

2 Utilize the second track. The second track is to the inside of the path along the rail. Riding on it gives you a feel of how balanced the horse is between both of your reins and both of your legs as the rider. This helps you manage his straightness.

3 Be aware of your horse’s strong and hollow sides and train accordingly. “Every horse has one hollow and one stronger side, and we have to manage this certainty in our own riding and training,” Schneider

ABOUT DOROTHEE SCHNEIDER

Germany’s Dorothee Schneider is a two-time Olympian with more than 400 FEI-level victories. Schneider was born into the equestrian world, as her father Hans-Eberhard Schneider was a Trakehner breeder, stallion owner and Grand Prix judge. In addition to her father, her mentors include Holger Schmezer, Michael Rasch, Hans Riegler, Jonny Hilberath and Monica Theodorescu. Originally, Schneider had thought of becoming a veterinarian and riding part-time, but instead she diverted from the plan to become a professional rider. She remained on her family farm and then studied finance, working as a bank clerk to develop a sense for business. In 2002, she established herself at her own farm, Stud St. Stephan, southwest of Frankfurt. Schneider did not have access to abundant financial resources, so she climbed the ranks of dressage by turning young horses into Grand Prix mounts, earning herself the nickname of “Championmaker.”

Today, Schneider’s facility has 50 stalls, and she currently rides 10–12 horses per day, from young horses through the Grand Prix level. She claimed medals at the 2012 London Olympics and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics and earned the team gold medal at the 2018 World Equestrian Games in Tryon, North Carolina. At the 2019 European Championships, she won team gold and individual silver in the Special as well as the Freestyle and became the sixth rider in history to score above a 90 percent, taking 90.561 percent in the Freestyle. She was also recently awarded the prestigious title of Reitmeisterin (riding master) by the German Federation and is the 35th rider—and third female—in history to receive this honor.

▲ Schneider encouraged riders in each session to stretch their horses to promote relaxation and improve the horse's balance. In this photo, Vincent Flores rides the 9-year-old Danish mare Southern Belle SWF.



job as the rider to find the best rhythm for your horse, so he is able to use his back. “Feel the rhythm and support it with your pelvis and your hips,” Schneider coached Vincent Flores aboard the gray Danish mare Southern Belle SWF, reminding him to maintain a defined three-beat rhythm in the canter. Often when discussing rhythm, Schneider used the phrase “take a seat,” advising riders to stretch in their bodies, open the knees and sit into their horses. Doing this helped riders communicate the desired rhythm more clearly to their horses.

5 Focus on the hind leg. Throughout the clinic, Schneider emphasized many of the fundamental concepts of correct dressage—not the least of which was riding the horse from active hind legs, over and through the back, reaching to the bit. She included several reminders to focus on the hind legs in different ways. For example, when a horse and rider transitioned from walk into trot, she said that the impulsion of the first step of trot comes from his hind leg. Also, in posting trot, imagine

The Demo Horses and Riders

The following horse-and-rider combinations were carefully selected by a judging panel of Lois Yukins and Sarah Geikie to work with Schneider and demonstrate the progression of training through the levels:

4- and 5-Year-Olds

- Carly Neilson of Nottingham, New Hampshire, and Gustaav, a 4-year-old German warmblood gelding sired by Goldburg out of a Rivero II mare
- Meghan Hamilton of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and Dornröschen, a 5-year-old Hanoverian mare by Dante Weltino out of a Don Schufro mare
- Bridgid Browne of Annandale, New Jersey, and Karina Sandra TF, a 4-year-old Dutch warmblood mare by Fiderbach out of an Uphill mare
- McKayla Hohmann of Georgetown, Massachusetts, and Wakensho II, a 5-year-old Oldenburg mare by Sir Gregory out of a Waterford mare

Third Level

- Alice Tarjan of Oldwick, New Jersey, and Hester, a 2012 Dutch Warmblood mare by Apache

- Vincent Flores of Haverhill, Massachusetts, and Southern Belle SWF, a 9-year-old Danish warmblood mare by Blue Hors Soprano out of a Fabriano mare

Fourth Level

- Katie Robicheaux of Plainville, Massachusetts, and Grandioso, an 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding by Uphill out of a Donnerhall mare

Prix St. Georges

- Eliza Rutherford of Charlotte, Vermont, and Watch Me Too, a 10-year-old Hanoverian gelding by Welfenkoenig II out of a Donnerhall mare

Intermediate

- Susanne Hamilton of Montville, Maine, and Lesath, a 10-year-old Hanoverian gelding by Legat out of a Derwisch mare

Grand Prix

- Olivia LaGoy-Weltz of Haymarket, Virginia, and Rassing's Lonoir, a 15-year-old Danish warmblood by De Noir out of a Loran mare



◀ Susanne Hamilton and Lesath, a 10-year-old Hanoverian gelding, were the demo pair for the Intermediate-level session. Schneider reminded riders of all levels to show their horses the way into the stretching.

that you take your horse's inside hind leg with you as you go upward and forward in the rising moment. Later in the horse's development, controlling his hind legs on the line of travel is one of the important factors of a good quality flying change.

6 Incorporate (outside) shoulder-in. In every session, Schneider instructed riders to utilize shoulder-in. This tool helps to stabilize the horse's inside hind leg underneath the body and also makes riders drive with their inside legs to the outside contact for better connection. Shoulder-in is about getting the horse to bend throughout his body, not just in his neck. "Riding shoulder-in does not mean riding with too much flexion. It means moving the outside shoulder in front of the inside hind leg," she explained. During Katie Robicheaux's Fourth Level demo ride aboard Grandioso, Schneider used shoulder-in to help Robicheaux prepare for half passes by confirming correct bend. "Bend your horse around your inside leg. The best preparation for the half pass is in shoulder-in."

7 Encourage your horse to reach to the bit with an open neck and throatlatch. Schneider incorporated periods of stretching at every gait in every session. It helps to promote relaxation but also improves the horse's balance. This stretching work was important for all horses, but it was especially helpful for horses who ducked behind the contact or were tense. "Your horse must be going to the bit with an

open neck," she said. Later she added, "Show them the way in the stretching, but not without contact." If you find that your horse comes behind the bit, take your hand down and forward as you activate the hind leg (providing motivation) to stabilize the contact over the back to the bit. You need to keep an even feel on both sides of the mouth, and your horse needs to stretch evenly into both hands. Avoid crossing your hands over your horse's withers.

8 Ride forward to your hands. "When you need more contact with your horse's mouth, don't take your hands higher," Schneider explained. You can raise them for a moment if you need your horse to come higher in the poll but only in combination with driving from the hind leg to the bit via a correct seat. Afterward directly take your hands down and in front of the saddle. You can always make your reins shorter, but as you do, remember to keep your hands in front of the saddle. Think about riding your horse longer in the neck to the bit but shorter in the area behind the saddle.

9 Play with your wrist for more freedom in the horse's mouth. You can use your wrist to vibrate your hand, which will help create movement in the horse's mouth and poll, making him lighter in the contact. This is especially helpful if you have a horse who gets strong. Don't use your whole arm because it will be too severe. 🐾



If you would like to hear more from Dorothee Schneider, tune into Season 1, Episode 8 of the *Dressage Today* Podcast. Schneider shares more about her background and offers advice for fellow riders.

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Understand Stifle Stresses

A closer look at this important and often-injured joint in dressage horses

By Greg Staller, DVM, DACVS

The nature of dressage places unique stresses on the horse's body. At the higher levels, the movements are precise and slowed down so there is less forward momentum than with, for example, a jumping horse. However, there is a tremendous amount of upward, sideways (lateral) or turning momentum. In addition, with the dressage horse working properly, the majority of the horse's mass is propelled from the hindquarters and the horse works from a constant and somewhat crouching stance. Therefore, the stifle joint is a very important and relatively often-

injured joint in the dressage horse. The stifle joint corresponds to the human knee joint and is comprised of the distal end of the femur, the menisci, the cruciate ligaments, the proximal tibia, the vestigial fibula and the patella (kneecap). Like the human knee, the joint has a relatively large range of motion, a property imparted from its unique structure. The structure of the stifle provides for tremendous power but subjects the components of the joint to forces that can lead to injury. With dressage horses, veterinarians often become involved

The nature of dressage places unique stresses on the horse's body.

earlier in the process of diagnosing injury to the musculoskeletal system than in other disciplines. Because of the precision, power, symmetry and rideability required of the dressage horse, dressage trainers know that very mild or subtle pain can cause difficulty for the horse in performance and seek veterinary advice before the horse may show clinical lameness. Stifle pain can manifest itself in subtle ways that a sensitive rider, trainer and veterinarian may be able to identify before more significant injury leads to overt lameness.

Common clinical signs that the stifles may be hurting include abduction of the upper hind limb as it is carried forward,



Courtesy, Greg Staller, DVM, DACVS

This radiograph of a dressage horse's stifle shows signs of arthritis with new bone produced around the joint (arrows) and increased soft tissue density indicating excess fluid within the joint.

which may be observed as a somewhat circular movement of the limb, rather than a straight movement forward. The horse may shorten the stride of the limb and be unwilling to reach under with it, which may alter the willingness or quality of the half pass away from the affected side. The horse may not maintain weight for as long on the limb in the passage and particularly the piaffe. There may be an irregular gait or rhythm in the extended trot. These issues are not diagnostic of stifle pain, but are consistent

the stifle and observing for an improvement in the horse's gait or the elimination of lameness. It may be possible to identify the stifle as the source of the problem without this step but it is important to positively identify the source of pain. If the stifle is, in fact, the joint involved, it is even more important to identify which of the many important structures associated with the joint is injured, as the treatment plan is very much dependent on what is injured and the extent or severity of the injury. As

imaging (MRI) produces excellent images of the interior of the horse's stifle, but there are practical issues, such as the need for the horse to be under general anesthesia and risks of injury from positioning the horse within the machine, that make this modality less useful.

Once an anatomic diagnosis is made, the treatments are varied. It may be appropriate to simply rest the horse briefly and prescribe a short course of anti-inflammatory medication. It may be indicated to inject the horse's stifle joints with an anti-inflammatory medication such as hyaluronic acid, a corticosteroid or possibly a biologic such as IRAP (interleukin receptor antagonist protein) or PRP (platelet-rich plasma). The intra-articular use of stem cells may be beneficial. For more severe injuries, arthroscopic surgery for treatment and positive identification of a lesion may be indicated and is usually combined with rest, medication and a careful rehabilitation program.

The prognosis for stifle injuries in the dressage horse depends on the structure injured, the severity of the injury and the level at which the horse is required to work.

As with the human athlete, the earlier the problem is identified and properly treated, including making changes in the training program, the more successful we can be at keeping the horse in top form. 🐾

The structure of the stifle provides for tremendous power but subjects the components of the joint to forces that can lead to injury.

with it and may lead one to focus on this joint. More significant and long-standing stifle issues may lead to clinical signs that are more specific for the stifle. These would include palpable increases in the amount of fluid within the stifle joints, thickening of the soft-tissue structures around the joint, pain on flexion and manipulation of the joint and signs of obvious lameness in the affected limb.

The diagnosis of lameness in the stifle is confirmed by injecting anesthetic into

with many injuries in the horse, it is the veterinarian's job to decide if a horse can safely continue to train with a certain injury or if he requires rest. Therefore, the exact nature of the injury is important to determine so the most appropriate treatment can be instituted.

Radiography, diagnostic ultrasonography and diagnostic arthroscopy are the main tools in the veterinarian's toolbox with which to accurately diagnose and treat stifle injury. Magnetic resonance

Greg Staller, DVM, received his doctor of veterinary medicine degree from the University of California at Davis in 1987. With primary interests in surgery, lameness diagnosis and treatment, ultrasonography, ophthalmology and internal medicine, he is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and an FEI Official Veterinarian in the disciplines of dressage, three-day eventing and combined driving. Married to FEI dressage rider Catherine Haddad, he is the founder and owner of Running 'S' Equine in Califon, New Jersey, and provides sports-medicine services in Wellington, Florida, and Aiken, South Carolina, during the winter season.