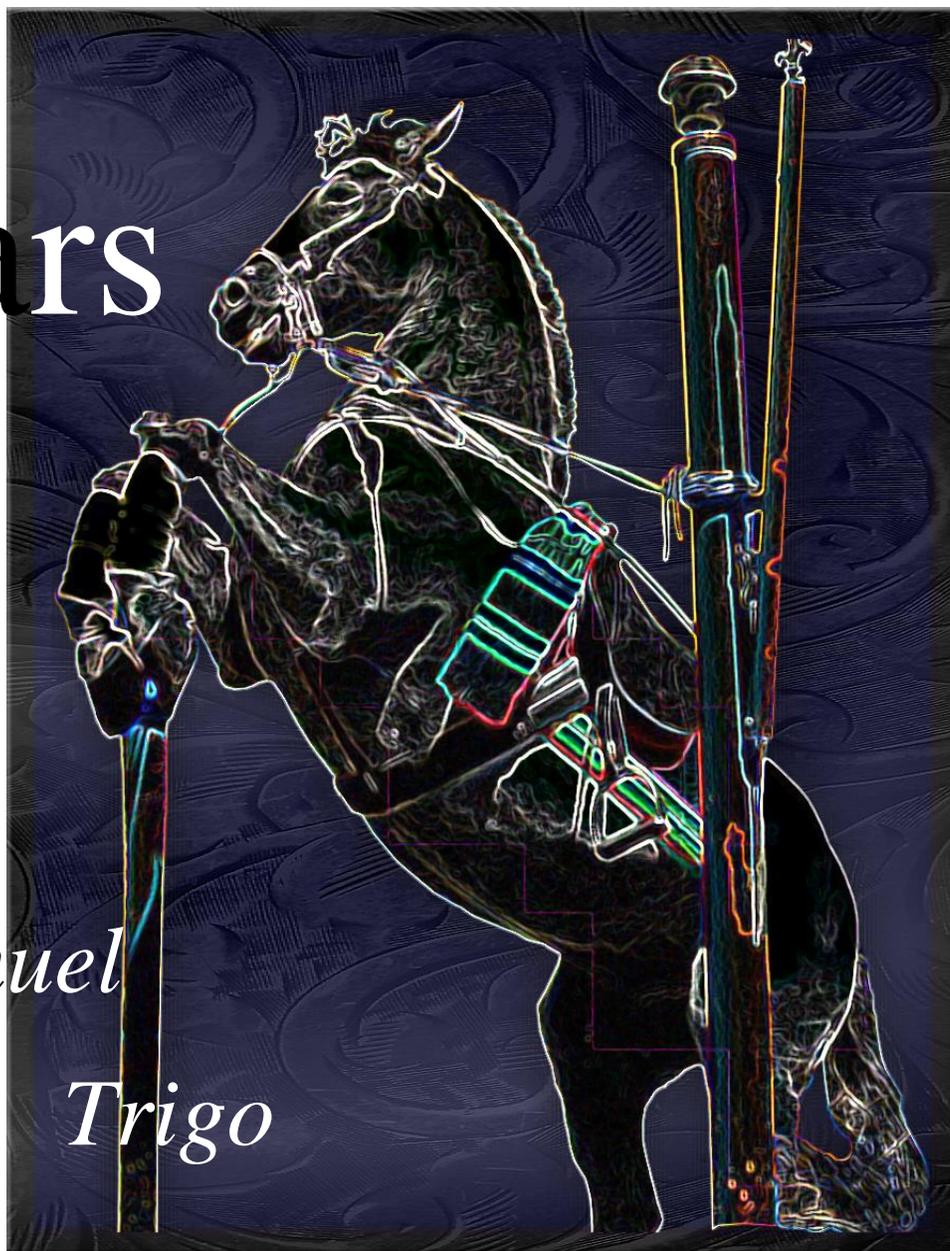


Specialty Course

Dressage of the horse in the Pillars

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Ver. English – Edition 1 – March 2011

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Principles

The use of the Pillars requires the trainer to have a very methodic mind. Exercises will be taught step by step to the horse with many repetitions, rewarding any improvement however small. From the trainer it will require a perfect knowledge about the psychology of the horse. Every day the trainer will be pushing the limits of his horse with tact and technique in training.

General principles to apply are the followings:

- 1) Go from the known to the unknown and from simple to the complex.
- 2) Use the same actions to obtain the same results.
- 3) Ask a little, reward often, reward generously.

I will add to these 3 universals principles:

- 4) Work the horse with as much impulsion for a very short time, then rest for a little while.
- 5) Repeat with moderation and remove the horse from the pillars as soon as possible.

The reward is the key! As soon as the trainer gets some correct movement, even if it small, the horse must be rewarded. If the horse shows improvement from the last command, he must be rewarded. This is not an easy task for the trainer and here *“going slow is going fast”*. For example in the case of a Piaffe the movement is fast and the trainer should analyze every diagonal and stop the horse as soon as he perceives a step better than the previous one. If the quality decreases the trainer must not stop the horse due to the risk that the horse will repeat (in the future) such poor quality. However the longer the horse performs the movement the lower the quality will be. This is why the trainer has a unique moment to stop the horse and to reward him. In most of the cases this moment could be of the duration of the blink of an eye. All the tact and finesse of the trainer in this case will depend on his visual and analytic skills and knowledge related to the movement expected of the horse. Incompetence of the trainer is what causes some of them to inflict bad treatment and punishment on the horses between the pillars. To be convinced just watch some videos on YouTube. Some have discovered than a horse that cannot escape being attached between the two pillars, scared to death of a painful whip or wooden stick, will sooner or later diagonalize or Piaffe.

Introduction of the horse to the Pillars

The horse needs to be introduced to the Pillars with complete confidence. To establish this, we will go through a couple of exercises. If we do not prepare the horse beforehand, most horses will panic or others will refuse to do anything.



In both cases they will look for an escape and could cause violent reactions.

I suggest the following steps prior to starting the training.

- With a lead rope or with the lead rope and long reins, the trainer will conduct the horse in between the Pillars at the walk several times always in the same direction. The horse will pass between, and in the future, will always be attached in the same direction.
- After several repetitions, as soon as the horse is comfortable going between the Pillars, at the walk and at the trot, the trainer will start reducing the speed, while passing between the Pillars, then, as soon as the horse passes, he will accelerate.
- When the horse is relaxed during the phase of slowing down, we can now stop the horse between the pillars, reward him and then leave at the walk or trot. It might be necessary to perform these exercises for several days. This step is extremely important and should not be rushed at the risk of wasting more time later.
- Finally we will stop between the pillars, ask for a diagonalization, stop again and repeat a couple of times, prior leaving the Pillars.

I strongly recommend the help of the assistant during this preparation phase and for the first days attached to the Pillars. The assistant stands and leads the horse in the front. He will react as the horse is supposed to do to the voice of the trainer.

Those lessons and preparations have as their goal making understand the horse clearly that there is only a unique way to leave the Pillars using the forward movement.



The First Lessons

The goal of the first lesson(s) is, to attach the horse to the Pillars, keeping the horse relaxed and confident, to get a mobilization in trot, to control the movement of the horse and eventually to keep him deep in the ropes.

It is extremely important to get some mobilization at the trot regardless of the quality of the trot. The trainer will immediately reward the horse as soon as he gets any mobilization, which in most cases will be swinging the croup from one side to the other between the Pillars. The trainer must stop quickly and reward him generously, if not the horse will look for defenses and certainly for an exit in front, on the side and behind the pillars causing rebellion. However if he immediately rewards any good action from the horse, the horse will yield, calm down, and will collaborate with his trainer.

If the horse has been previously trained in the long reins, which I strongly recommend, the first lesson(s) is, or should be, a simple formality. In the opposite case, the initiation could be a more delicate matter depending on the horse's spirit and good will. In both cases it is indispensable to work with an Assistant who will help to keep the horse deep in the ropes and straight avoiding the horse from backing in the ropes up.

In the case of previous training with the long reins, the horse will be equipped with a surcingle and bit. The horse's tail should be wrapped or knotted to allow easy access to the hind-legs with the whip.



In order to keep the horse confident and to avoid any disorder, the assistant should stand on the left side next to the horse's head, looking in the same direction as the horse, or a few steps in front of the horse and facing him. The assistant will keep his position even in the case of quick movement of the horse, he will hold the lead, resist if necessary but in any case will pull the horse back in his direction. The lead rope should be



attached to the stall halter, a presentation serreta or the middle ring of a caveçon.

Before beginning any work in the pillars, it is very important to correctly warm-up the horse at the walk, trot and canter. If the horse has been trained to the long reins, it will be smoother to work the horse with the long reins for at least 10 minutes. The trainer could ask for some collected trot, several halts, and some backup and immediate transition to collected trot. Some Piaffe too, if the horse already performs this gate. After this short preparation the horse is



given a short break and then he will start working him with the Pillars.

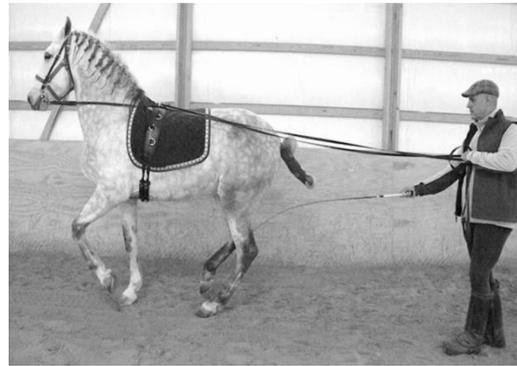
The first and second day, it is a good idea to pass the horse several times between the pillars (as we did for the introduction) before attaching him to the pillars to begin the lesson.

After each repetition of each exercise and during several days, both trainer and assistant will reward and flatter the horse. The first few days, the Assistant can give him treats at this moment. The trainer staying behind the horse should just reward and pat him on his croup. He will take advantage of this moment of relaxation to pat the horse with the whip to erase any fears and to encourage his good work.

If the horse was trained with the long-reins it will be preferable to work both long reins in the left hand and the right hand with a single whip. Otherwise the trainer will use 2 whips on each side of the horse.

To control the croup, the first action will be to teach him to move his haunches from left to right and vice-versa. The trainer will change his position (being 45 degrees behind the horse), staying a safe distance in case of a kick. The trainer will lightly use the whip on the thigh of the horse, pushing him away. Another possibility is to make some noise with the whip on the ground. If the horse doesn't understand, the assistant will take the horse's head and move it in the opposite direction from where the whip is suggesting him to move.

To stop the horse the trainer will use pressure with the whip on the top part of the horse's croup until immobilization occurs. There after he will slowly remove the whip and generously reward the horse.



As soon as the horse is swinging from left to right and vice-versa moving away from one and the other whip, the trainer will reduce the size of the lateral movement and will push the horse in the ropes, trying to get a diagonalization or a trot. At this level the horse has to accept the contact in the ropes and should not fight them anymore. It is acceptable in the first lessons that the horse backs up a moment for a couple of steps in the ropes. The trainer will each time, helped by the assistant if necessary, push the horse deep in the ropes until he takes the contact.



Training session after training session, the horse should stop backing up in the ropes. Some horses will test the strength of the ropes, pushing them or trying to bolt. The trainer should not stop him after the rebellion. The correct response will be to calm him with the voice and keep him for a very short instant in trot or swinging from the haunches before stopping and rewarding him.

When the horse diagonalizes at the request of the trainer, the training session in the pillars will finish with generous rewards and then the horse will be detached from the pillars. If the horse is equipped with long reins, I suggest leaving the Pillars straight in a collected trot for 20-30 meters. After which the training is finished. After a couple of weeks of continued training these first efforts of diagonalization will be transformed to the beginning of Piaffe.

The training sessions need to have a lot of impulsion and energy interspersed by resting periods from 30 to 90 seconds. The impulsion between the pillars has to be cultivated. Every day and for each repetition the horse has to work with more and more impulsion. A good way to cultivate this impulsion is never to allow the horse to be too tired. This will teach him to preserve and save his strengths. The trainer activates the horse with the voice and the whip always respecting the principles of lightness and specifically the separation of the aids. Generously reward any increase of impulsion in each repetition. It is the job of the trainer to be attentive to how tired the horse has become during training.