

AN AMERICAN APPRECIATION OF THE FRENCH SYSTEM
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THe method of riding and training horses is more or less determined by the nature of the horse and his physical characteristics, plus the work for which he is intended. This has been true over time, and has produced methods as diverse as the Weyrother Method and the Caprilli Method. The American, German, Hungarian, Portugese and French Methods are all wonderful methods that work beautifully. A study of each of them is well justified as a basic education for a trainer. It takes time.

I was lucky to be a shy kid and not in the social life. I read and read about these systems and had ideas about riding that I never would have had, in the cornfields of Minnesota.

I persued my direction with the arrival of Karl Mikolka in my life, who taught the Weyrother Method. Reiner Klimke, equally passionate about the classic methods, taught me his German Method, and my eventual migration to France has allowed a deep immersion into the French Method.

All classic methods work. The best method must be that which corresponds with the horse. There can be no strict adherence to a method which is not acceptable to the animal.

The French Method is centered on lightness, freedom and forward riding. It is closest to the American System where self carriage is shown in every hunter competition. The light seat, the long neck, the freedom of rein, all correspond with a "blood" horse.

One of the foundation breeds for the French was the Anglo Arab. A very light horse, full of blood, highly sensitive and intelligent... his influence in the later breeding of sport horses was invaluable. Another of these foundation breeds was the AQPS (Other Than Thoroughbred) . This breed, still raced today, is comparable to the American "seven eighths bred" . He is close to full blood, but with something else.

These two breeds were, in my friend Jack Le Goff s opinion, the best breeds in the world for eventing. They are close in character and in physical attributes to the American Thoroughbred. As a result of this breeding, the French Method evolved.

The Thoroughbred was the horse available for the eventing and show jumping competition in America. As a result of the breed, the American Method evolved. It is interesting how the two methods share so many concepts.

But things changed. The Americans began to import German warm bloods. At the time the new European horse came on the scene in America, the breeding in Europe was a heavier, slower thinking horse. This horse produced no adrenaline. He did not rise to the occasion, like a blood horse will. He could be spooky. He was responsible for an evolution in the American scene...more dressage training.

Because classic dressage was very rarely taught in the USA, trainers were rapidly imported. Some were fabulous... De Nemethy, Folteny, Watjen... And others were not...

Absolutely frustrated by my inability to ride this new type of horse, I went to Germany to get help from Reiner Klimke. He let me ride his horses, who were hot. He told me that the Good warm blood has energy and curiosity like any thoroughbred. He told me to make a better selection in Europe. I did.

At the same time the regulations of the show jumping competitions were changing...shortened time allowed, flatter cups, highly sophisticated course designers! The Northern European breeders rapidly changed their breeding to produce this faster, modern horse. The German Method evolved to accommodate the new horse and the new structure of the competition. German riders rode more like American riders!



Scuderia 1918 Viking dl'a Rousserie

When I moved to France the French competition had not yet evolved and the breeding was closed to outside influence. The program was, in my mind ,stagnant. The changes effected in the breeding in France by forward thinking breeders and an opening up of the National Stud rapidly produced a new type of horse, really competitive in both Three Day and Showjumping competition.

When I had earlier toured France with Jack le Goff to find horses for the team,I watched a lot of riding as we were shown hundreds of horses. In the car I asked Jack why we saw so little evidence of the old classic French Method of riding. He

sighed and told me that it was a thing of the past and only to be seen at SAUMUR where money was not an issue. The old breeds that he favored were not popular, and the ones bred in Normandie were too heavy. We did not go to Normandie at all.

It is a great regret that he was not able to see the transition to what is now the MODERN FRENCH HORSE bred in Normandie and elsewhere. The influx of blood coming from the inspired breeding in Germany, with the French, natural galloper that he is, has produced a horse at the top in both disciplines!

The breeding of this horse has also produced a remarkable return to the classic French Method of riding. Lightness, freedom and forward riding are all to be seen again in France at top competition. In the TOP TEN competition upcoming in Geneva, three of the ten qualified are French. Kevin Staut has become an icon of style and technique worldwide.

The method of riding and training horses must be the method which corresponds to the nature of the horse, and his physical characteristics. The rider who is open to his horse will learn from his horse. As an American living in France, I am doubly appreciative of the positive and correct evolution toward the classic method of French riding.

