

That's Not A Halt!

by Debby Buck Dejonge

For those of you Dressage enthusiast's whose initiation into the sport was easy street in that you were started on your very first Labrador Retriever of a schoolmaster mount with a talented, credentialed professional babysitting your every move please go to the back of the line where all the rest of us started!!!! I crack myself up when I think about the way I was tricked into my first slew of "lessons" and later clinics and months of "training". Not to mention- the gobs money, (that never seemed like enough). Calling all banks, calling all banks, I just got saddled with this new addiction called Dressage, and I need an offshore loan to begin to finance said Sport. Not only that, apparently it's not supposed to be fun and we all have to dress alike! The aforementioned alone was enough to give me a rash. Having ridden my entire life in everything from Trail, to Western, to Hunter, and 4-H, gave me little preparation for the rigors of this sport of dressage. How hard can it be I asked myself? Plenty difficult. That's how. This is when I learned a lot of personal traits about myself that are not exactly "attributes." First of all, I discovered that I was dyslexic AND had trouble memorizing "invisible" letters, which were strategically placed in the arena for what reason I had no idea! Secondly, I had never competed in an arena alone. It gave pause to the movie, "Home Alone" in which the child is left behind to fend for himself. That's just how I felt. How for example can I follow the leader, get behind the 'calm' horse, or get lost in the mix when I am in center stage by myself with this huge horse that is less amused than I? That was then, this is now! Over a dozen years have passed since my inauguration into Dressage. The things that once seemed so over facing are now second nature, (and not even noteworthy). Except to say that a few of my "newcomer" friends to the sport have similar experiences with the "whys" and "where's" and "how's" of the once mystical dance of two. Apparently, a lot of us go through this Bermuda Triangle feeling until we get our bearings through trial and error, lessons and clinics, generous horse after generous horse and a long hard look at our inner personalities and the fact that awesome riders who are petite women can articulate the every muscle and movement of XXL horses with just a nudge of their abdomen or a look toward heaven. Two such greats come to mind: Lisa Payne, trainer of the year 2002 and Malachy on Parade, a horse so huge that watching her perform her FEI level tests on him gave us all something to take our hats off. And Betsy Steiner on a myriad of huge mounts. Obviously, it is not necessary to be a big, huge, angry spur wearing, gun totin', Whip brandishing badass to be a partner to these fine steeds. It's called communication, understanding and training which is exactly why I am counted among the forever smitten in the Dressage department. I was thrilled to be asked to be the Presenter of The Dressage At Devon Freestyle where the rides are hair raising. That is, the little blonde hairs on my neck presented themselves every time Neil Ishoy, or a Pamela Goodrich hit the beat with the hooves like a drummer and pianist in perfect harmony. Another great rider/trainer whom was very instrumental in my progress and rode for the US in the Can Am Challenge at Dressage At Devon is Jerry Schwartz. He was another rider who put in his "time." Jerry's seat is evident to me even in a packed show grounds such as Devon. For he spent five years on a longe line in Germany, and it shows. I have the ultimate respect for those riders who have "made it" on their own- through a lot of sweat and hard work. Apparently I must be improving my dressage skills as well my young daughter



pointed out that “the new horse makes me stinky.” No Pain no Gain, (Lisa Payne’s motto). The entire sport has been a wonderful addition to my life in so many ways. I love the horses, the people and the worldly camaraderie. The pinnacle of the sport is the freestyles, which I find so enjoyable that and fun to perform that I do two: The Fun Freestyle, and the Traditional. This gives me a reason to do “20 meter rising trot circles” even on my FEI horse that I learned needs the basics every day just like the greenies. The components of dressage that were once a chore now seem like my favorite pair of shoes. I am even grateful for some of my initial lessons, which was not exactly fun. Like when one of my first shows I was verbally and visually Admonished by a Judge who is normally very nice, Sue Hughes was thanked a dozen years later for her having shaped My career by standing at the end of my “ride” and loudly Stating: “That’s Not A Halt!