



# UNDERSTANDING THE SCALE OF TRAINING - PART 1: IMPROVING THE WAY OF GOING.

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Most trainers subscribe to the German scale of training by default however the English translation of each of the levels is exceptionally weak. The other issue is that a lot of trainers and coaches only understand the scale of training in a very superficial way. True interpretation of any training system involves going beyond the words into the principles and precepts. Using the scale of training alone is rather a blunt instrument but it is seen by many as the be-all and end-all. As we drill down into the training scale you start to notice the fibrous connections needed for successful training. Each scale is like a tree trunk however without the roots, branches and leaves you don't really have a tree!

The first level of the German scale of training is known in English as "Rhythm". This however is a deficient translation that does not really get to the nucleus of this tier of the scale. First, it is useful to look at the transition from the German "Takt" which translates directly as "tact" which is defined as "sensitivity and skill dealing with others". However, this is not reflected in the translation or applied by many in their interpretation. There are three main facets I think of with Rhythm/Takt;

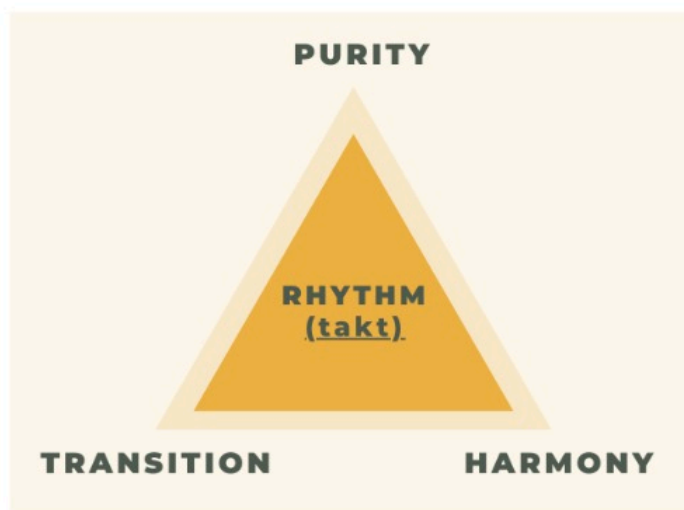
- Purity (Way of going).
- Biomechanical connection (Optimising body movement patterns).
- Transitions pace to pace (Testing sensitive connected communication).

## PURITY - WAY OF GOING

The horse's way of going is one of the pivotal qualities that we need to cultivate in training our equine counterparts. While most riders and trainers, particularly professional producers, see horses as athletes they often forget that "the horse does not volunteer for the job ... we put them to it"- Dr.Andrew McClean PhD. Just like humans every horse has their own movement pattern. This pattern can be easily disrupted and compromised through discomfort, restrictive training practices or poor management protocols (stereotypical behaviours/lack of turnout). In every aspect of training, it is essential to respect the horse's natural paces and develop them with sensitivity. In many training systems little time is spent developing the paces; taking time to understand the difference between purity and regularity, but that is a topic that stands alone. For now, it is sufficient to work on the premise that horses should move unrestricted allowing them to exhibit natural behaviour in an educated and expressive way.

## BIOMECHANICAL CONNECTION

There has long been discussion, particularly in the dressage world about "leg movers" and "body movers". A leg mover is a horse that exclusively moves their legs without having the corresponding body movement pattern. This is a serious issue and is usually induced by rushed training often using fixed apparatus. One of the main reasons to work to correct a leg mover is the long term damage to their musculoskeletal system. The anatomy of the horse is such that their limbs are practically devoid of muscle. Instead, their locomotion muscles are centred around the core of the body and very close to the central pattern generators. In training the horse it is critical to stimulate these core muscles to optimise biomechanical health, this is similar to a human going to Pilates to improve sporting performance. Just like a person learning good form in the gym the horse needs time to strengthen and co-ordinate their body movement pattern. Without this time you start to get a compromised body movement pattern.



Continued

## TRANSITIONS PACE TO PACE

It is a common denominator in nearly every training system that transitions are an important and pivotal component to physical and communication development in the horse. However, like every skill, it must be remembered that **"practice makes permanent"**. Transitions are only really useful when you train their quality. I remember talking to leading equitation scientist Dr. Angelo Telatin FBHS about the use of transitions. His take was that **if you can't get improvement in three attempts your approach is ineffective!** Horses are exceptionally good at learning, however, by the same token humans are very poor at being consistent. In training transitions, you need to have a measurable approach. Just like in any business development your approach needs to be SMART

- Specific - what is the purpose of this transition, what is the targeted response?
- Measurable - Was the target met? How many percent off was it? In the next one, what is the percentage improvement?
- Achievable - Is the target possible in three repetitions or does the question need to be made smaller?
- Realistic - Is it realistic to expect the horse in their current education and fitness to meet this target?
- Timed - How many repetitions is it taking?

There are so many memes about the trauma caused to dressage horses; "I go into the arena and all she does is circle and circle and circle". I have to admit this is often my experience, coaches and riders repeating the same thing again and again with no improvement! If you are not achieving one way, is there another approach? This is where a good coach or eye on the ground can make all the difference to your transitions and training in general!

The key to the successful integration of scale of training is to look beyond the words into the intent behind their construction. The training scale is there to assist you not to impede you! In the next article we will be looking at the next tier on the scale of training; Losgelassenheit (Suppleness)



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