

**Reply by Philippe Karl to the article “Main haute, main basse” (High hand, low hand) by Michel Henriquet in the French riding magazine “Cheval Magazine”, July 2005**

Dear Sir,

Allow me to summarize your words: the use of a high hand is "inept... distressing... stupid"; while a low hand is something akin to an equestrian panacea. As a person used to being described by those who like restrictive concepts and quick judgements as an "apostle of the high hand", I consider it my duty to enlighten you on this matter. So let's substitute the simplistic arguments and disparaging adjectives by technical rigour and calm analysis.

## **The End and the Means**

Deliberately restricted to a selective and biased study of the Great Masters, unaware of equine realities (anatomy, physiology, balance, locomotion, psychology, etc.) and obsessed by its competitive objectives, official dressage consistently confuses the end and the means. "En dressage, le grand écueil est la manie de s'en prendre aux effets au lieu de rechercher leurs causes pour les modifier." (E. Beudant) ("In dressage, the biggest mistake is the tendency to correct the effects rather than searching and acting on the causes.")

The finished horse, with perfectly educated mouth ("mise-en-main") can be presented by a rider with fixed and low hands (anyway, relative to the horse's attitude). However, this is a **presentation** situation (cf. FEI).

The true question is: how to educate the horse to the rider's hand, and achieve a true "mise-en-main" (complete "ramener": the raising of the neck + flexion of the poll + mobility of the jaw), without using tricks? Here we are finally talking about **dressage**. And you don't need a degree in logic to understand that something perfectly valid as an end, cannot necessarily also be used as a means.

## Educating the horse to the hand

Let's start with an untouched horse that has never been constrained with any gadgets and let's begin his training.

The snaffle can act either on the tongue (low hands) or on the corner of the lips (high hands). Depending on their conformation or their temperament, horses try to avoid the hand, either by opening the poll to pull, by leaning on the bit or by inverting the neck. Not everyone can afford horses that are born already half-trained.

### The "high hand" option

- The horse that pulls by opening the poll

First, ensure that raising both hands gently, slightly raising the corner of the lips, mobilizes the tongue and the jaw (swallowing leading to the **relaxation** of the whole forehead).

Then, raise the inside hand to combine a marked lateral flexion of the neck with the yielding of the jaw (under these conditions, two fingers are enough).

Anatomically incompatible with the blocking of the poll, this lateral flexion leads to an extension of the neck which brings the nose closer to the vertical (provided that the rider knows how to release).

Methodically, first in hand, then ridden, at halt then walk, trot and lastly canter... the rider successively relaxes, supples, lengthens and then rounds his horse. He lengthens the topline and is therefore able to manage the forward movement.

