

Seminar with Charles de Kunffy and Gerd Heuschmann, Churchill, Oxfordshire, 20-21 July 2013

Notes by Daune Bronte-Stewart. I have tried to represent the conversations as accurately as possible but, of course, what is written here has been subject to (i) my appreciation and its filters and (ii) the difficulty of taking sensible notes at such an interesting event. Consequently, any mistakes below are entirely mine.

Charles de Kunffy (lecture 20/7/2013)

Ride to the horse's 'needs' and not his 'wants' – he may much prefer you to go the way he likes it, eg. sitting to the left.

The Baroque age of rationality and enlightenment – CdeK misses this age.

The horse puts his behavior into your custody, thereby transferring his reaction to instinct to you, the rider.

Horses do not know industry but they do know pleasure. Horses enjoy the effortless display of power. Nothing to do with the idea of the horse being the vehicle by which the rider displays himself.

Classical riding – an academic subject, based upon scientific evidence, and an art.

'intellectual curiosity' – humans are the only creatures that go beyond knowledge – we can analyse, synthesise, understand. Horses only have knowledge – they cannot analyse, synthesise and understand. Distinction between knowledge and understanding – because of understanding the academic rider is more informed.

'Noble' – nobleman and rider – the two words have the same meaning in many languages. The young aristocrat was raised on horseback so learnt primary virtue – courage and how to be noble.

How do you handle incidents with a horse with courage? Control of the emotions and mind – this is the discipline required of the rider.

A skilled rider is a menace with the wrong spirit. You are spiritual when you ride; in a world by yourself; horse and me – a unit of companionship, a spiritual experience; the weight of the body disappears, so immersed, with a contact between myself and the horse, it was a spiritual experience. This experience represents an important point of growing up from an egotistical self-centred 'child'. The body is the least important – the brain is the communication medium, i.e. we use it to teach the horse a new language. You use this language to communicate your will.

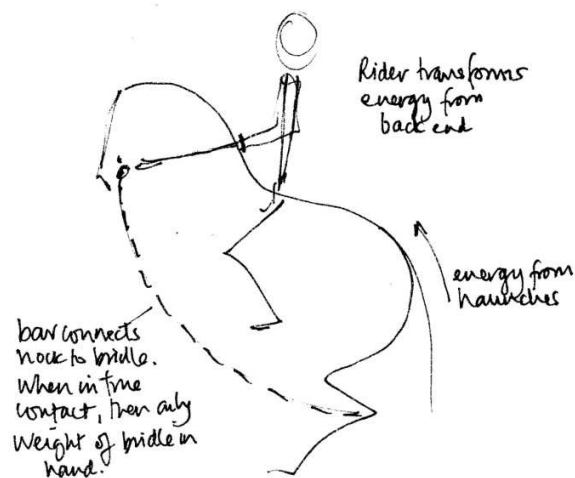
"to sit in the horse's movement integrated" – the horse doesn't feel his skin because it is an integrated part of him – *in the same way the rider needs to be an integrated part of the whole* [my interpretation]. As you develop riding skill, your spirit and mind develop too. If you have a spirit/mind problem, then you have a real problem. If you have a problem with your leg – this is nothing, it is nowhere near as important as a problem with your mind/spirit (this was what CdeK was taught).

"Aids of accident" – happen when you ride badly and ride in a non-integrated way. When use "aids by design" (good riding) then you need to be integrated to talk with the horse in a quiet, clear way, i.e. may be just a question of the tone of muscles to go from extended to collected trot. We need to be integrated otherwise we will miss the nuances.

Science helps to tell us that what we have found out over years of practice is right. i.e. what was knowledge in 1635 is now 'proved'.

CdeK explained that modern dressage horses are more like carriage horses – what he calls 'butt-high', they lift their riders and run with no lowering of the haunches, bend at neck. A horse should move like a cat when it bends its joints – it sinks in the movement – not like horses we see today going like a cement mixer.

Nature is lazy –e.g. rivers always flow down the mountain. Horses, by nature, would rather not bend their joints.



The rider's elbow does not move but instead it connects the horse through his bit to his hocks. Very important that the upper arm remains vertical. Imagine a kind of bow connecting hocks to bridle – when in true contact then the rider will feel only the weight of the bridle in the hand.

Yield to the horse every time he does what you ask for; yield immediately.

Ride forward – ride hocks forward and upwards, i.e. step closer to mouth.

3 problems to be addressed:

- 1) Inversion (goes above the bit)
- 2) Running
- 3) Crookedness

Passage demonstrates that we can master power and speed.

Telephone book analogy – we have only 9 numbers and 0 and yet look at the number of combinations these 10 characters can give us. A horse can work with just 4 variables:

Shoulders in or out and

Haunches in or out

A horse can produce a telephone book's worth of evasions from just these four things.

The reins are not brakes or to be used for torture: they are to help us make the horse functionally straight.

Gerd Heuschmann 20/7/2013 - Biomechanics of the Riding Horse

It is impossible to be a good rider by only focusing on biomechanics. As you become a better rider, improvements come from the mind. Good riding has to do with an incredible connection with a horse. "Good riding: a question of philosophy/culture – not a question of breed or discipline." Horses 100% with the rider – this happens when the rider is integrated with the horse.

Rhythm, suppleness, contact – when achieve these we will have harmony.

"The seat is everything you have as a rider".

If you are not in balance you are a bad rider.

"You have to control the emotions" – our world is so fast and our reactions quick – important for us to be in control of such reactions. We are processing situations so quickly – we have to slow down to ride. I groom my horse to help me slow down.

If you jump on a horse to do something – it's no good. If the horse is walking, let it, give it time. Give and wait, don't rush.

It's all about the seat if you are an experienced rider. It is life-long learning – you learn all your life.

The "Swinging back"

Today's riders sit on a horse not in a horse. HDv12, 1937 – German Rulebook (GH referred to this constantly as a source of 'rules' and advice).

When you get swing in the horse's back then you get connection – like a dance with 2 totally different species – an intelligent being and a flight animal.

"On the bit" – a young horse needs his head ('long neck and a hanging nose') to balance.

Every horse has his own way to move - their own rhythm. Rhythm – one step is like the next, same speed, same length. Its important to find the rhythm and tempo for each horse. Find the rhythm where you feel comfortable, relaxed without resistance.

Most riders are stiff in the brain. If any part of the horse is stiff then the tempo will be out – need to tackle stiffness to get tempo.

"I swing my horse with my soft seat into the contact"

The *horse* goes to the bit.

In war (German cavalry) they used the double bridle so could control the horse fully with one hand. In the cavalry school training a remonte would take 2 years. If a horse was not supple at the end of this period he would return to earlier training.

Without suppleness further training makes no sense. If the back is not soft you cannot straighten a horse.

To correct a stiff horse with a pulled mouth, make yourself safe and gallop – its good for the horse's back muscles, makes the sacroiliac joint work. Stiff horses are helped by forward galloping.

Water hose analogy – the (friendly, soft, open) seat can allow water from back to front but the (pushing, grinding) seat can stop it by blocking it.

You cannot solve a contact problem by working on the horse's mouth.

A horse is badly affected by a rider who is stiff, with stiff shoulders, squeezing thighs and calfs.

Need a very soft swing in the spine – so soft you cannot see it. If you are stiff you are on the back, not in it.

I hate too much formalism – this can make you stiff – remember: The Form Follows the Function. Unction before Form – very important for GH. The ribcage can bend 4-7 degrees – not a lot but its where we sit and therefore have the maximum potential to influence the ride. But research has shown that the trunk can rotate so for example, in shoulder-in where it is vital that there is some bend in the trunk to allow the haunches to sink and the inside hind leg to step under the body. Two-track movements (lateral work) must have bend .

Discussion session

CdeK – the rein is an extension of the seat. We should not separate the rider’s arms from their torso. He showed how the reins can be lightened by swiveling the torso using a bridle help at the bit by GH. He sat on a chair with the reins around his waist and holding the reins as if riding. He balanced on the front legs of the chair to simulate a horse walking and showed how NOT to ‘follow’ the horse by giving the reins each step. He then demonstrated how by swiveling the torso left and right he could lighten the reins without giving them away.

CdeK explained a simple, 3 step way to correct over-flexing:

1. Slow down (2 or 3 strides)
2. Abruptly release the reins and retake
3. Drive vigorously with the inside leg.

Slowing down for the above correction is critical. This strategy was used numerous times successfully in the afternoon demonstration rides.

CdeK – “Life is full of nasty things that never happen”

GH – sitting fully seated in canter is not going to work if the horse is not balanced. People try to work with hands in canter too early and this locks the horse’s back. Steinbrecht says to keep off the reins in canter until the horse can manage canter/trot transitions, canter/walk transitions and shoulder-in in canter.

CdeK – you cannot shape a horse, only his energies.

Dealing with resistance – take contact, hands balanced and level with mouth, give and then take 3 or 4 strides and give, take 3 or 4 strides and give, take.... The horse should become softer with each ask.

Throughout the discussion there was clear principles agreed between CdeK and GH but it seems that the way in which these principles are implemented may differ. This is in evidence in the demonstrations when GH would sometimes take the ‘floor’ and say that if he were instructing the rider he would ask them to

GH – today we forget how to walk. The full use of walk is something he likes in CdeK demonstrations.

Another point emphasized throughout the demonstration by CdeK was that:

You learn your seat by going “behind the vertical” (ie leaning back). Once you can be still (from loading your seat by leaning back) then you will understand how to sit vertical. When you lean back and then sit straight, lift the ribs up – this will put you vertical.

Shoulder-in – outside leg back and down one hair away from the horse’s side.

[interesting that CdeK seems to want the rider to learn how to sit the trot before being allowed to go forward in rising trot and canter.]

CdeK - 'Abs' of steel are fundamental to riding.

Shoulder-in- *allow* outside rein to allow horse to stretch into the bend and go forward.

When a horse tilts his head, yield the rein the side the nose goes to.

Medicinal exercises:

Hocks and shoulders = shoulder-in

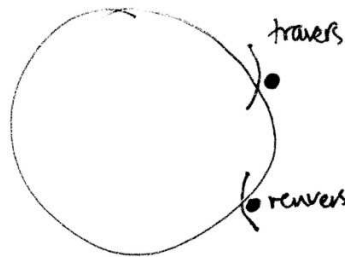
Stifle = haunches in

Hips = half-pass

The above represents old advice – GH explained in his talk that his research indicated that hock and stifle work together.

GH – Podhajsky did not allow haunches in to be ridden, mostly rode renvers.

Haunches in on a circle – likely that you will not use inside leg so you do not get the required bend; ride renvers in a circle and you have to get bend with the inside leg.



Counter-canter is the best straightening exercise.

It is very important for the rider to know which pattern 'cures' which 'disease'. Crookedness cured by renvers and counter-canter.

To get elevation (suspension) give left rein, right rein....

When you have a good trot, steady, forward and soft, then 4 strides canter, trot, canter ,trot...

Then move to 4 strides shoulder-in trot on circle, 4 strides canter, trot in shoulder-in,

Shoulder-in to canter – very important - for the rider it aids sophistication, for horse – liberates the back, softening and oscillating....

Trot, shoulder-in, canter = medicinal

Walk, canter, walk = strength building

So important to lean back to keep one's bum in the saddle and then push a little to lengthen the stride.

Legs = energise

Seat = modifies

Reins = verify – when the horse does something you want – yield straight a way.

Exercises:

Shoulder-in circle, shoulder-out circle, haunches in circle, half pirouette.... Repeat.

Collect walk, half pirouette, canter....

Collected walk, 4 strides canter, walk, half pirouette, canter other rein....

So important for rider to keep arms to their side and lower arm at level of the bit. Then move torso and hips together, ie shoulder-in aids.

CdeK = sitting on inside seat-bone is caused by outside leg back. At the SRS if the outside leg was not back you were thrown out.

The rider has 2 toolboxes:

Knowledge

Riding patterns

GH – The hands should always be on the level of the horse’s mouth – if you pull the hands down **you** are leaning on the bit.

CdeK – low hands only work if the arm, shoulder and elbow is correct. If elbows straighten then they drag on the bit.

Upper arm has to be in the correct position. If the seat is wobbly then lifting the forearm can help stabilize the seat.

When you carry yourself, the horse comes to meet you.

The horse wears his mind on his body.

Spooky horses are stiff horses – so if you relax their back there is no spooking. Let him go, he’ll get rid of stiffness and then he’ll blow...etc.

Day 2

Charles de Kunffy: Deep knowledge about training helps a lot

Developmental growth

- 1) Rehabilitation – the horse’s balance and purity of gaits
- 2) Therapeutic work (gradually) achieve ambidexterity and functional straightness
 - a. Spinal alignment
 - b. Even use of haunches
 - c. Direction of hind legs} these are all problems that arise when we put a rider on (not natural)
- 3) Gymnastic progress to:
 - a. Maximum performance with minimum effort (pleasure)
 - b. Amplification of gaits
 - c. Maximum collection
 - d. Engage to self-carriage

Daily Vocabulary of Training

- 1) Long/short frame } to conquer evasion
- 2) Long/short stride } and to supple
- 3) Bend to straightness }

These 3 things (above) should happen all the time (“take your time but don’t waste time”)

For example, on a circle you can make 4 transitions easily: constantly bend, straighten, lengthen, etc.

Suppleness

Relaxed mind

Focus on rider

Abandonment of instincts (in favour of listening to rider)

adjustable

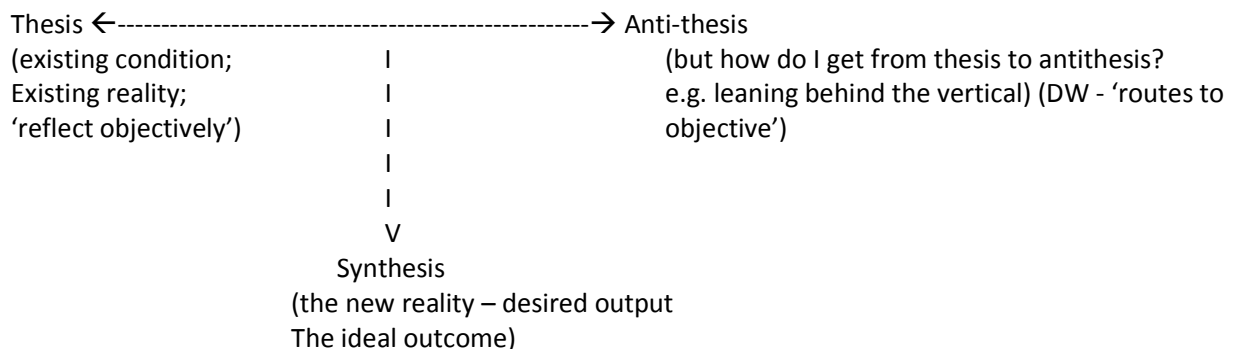
pliable

bendable

permeable (by all energy without tension)

Hegel’s Dialectics

The dynamics of riding and life – the ‘rules’ for a well-conducted life, controlled by the one living it.



The equestrian life is a metaphor for a life well-lived.

Always using the poor seat as an example – the idea that leaning back will help you learn to sit straight. [DW – this seems to be very similar to concept of ‘relationship-maintenance’ – ie issue about not placing the ‘goals’ at the anti-thesis point ; the quick fix.]

GH – people go to Spain and ride piaffe and passage and then think they are great riders. But they cannot sit a trot.

CdeK – riding = pelvic surfing; you ride waves. In a lesson we work always on the anti-thesis i.e. leaning back. We do not work on the synthesis. i.e. end result.

An example – how we might experiment with moving the shoulders (rider's) in time to the horse's shoulders. We do not want this to be the end result but the way in which we move from current (undesirable) situation to the desired state.

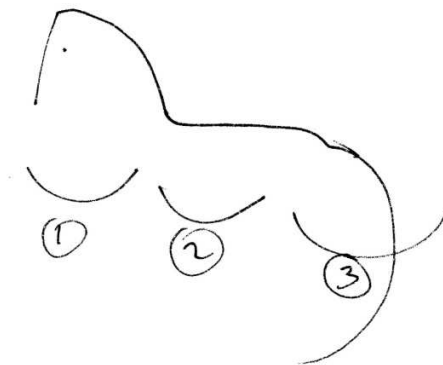
CdeK – demonstrates way to arrange one's arms/hands. Stand with your arms out, back, clasp hands on your bottom, shoulders open, then unclasp hands and allow them to fall (they will fall a little behind the body), then bend the elbows, knuckles touching. This is the position of passive resistance. In this position the horse finds the bit with his haunches, and when he finds it, then, he can yield.

Legs – knees closed, buttocks open. This is function not 'style'.
The horse is not proactive, he is reactive.

CdeK – we were taught that the medium trot and passage are the same sort of power. i.e. you stretch the passage, elongate it for medium trot. Nowadays, the medium trot often runs like mad. Passage, medium trot, passage – stretches the passage.

3 inches in front of the withers – if pleated then this is terrible – evidence that the horse is pulling its neck back in collection (it should be stretched out, of course).

Think of horses as 3 bascules:



But (2) (longissimus dorsi.) is effecting (3) – if loins are not relaxed then sacroiliac joint cannot be free to work.

Q – can Classical Dressage and Competitive Dressage ever be consistent?

CdeK – they should be the same because Classical Dressage is the scientifically (?) correct way to train.

1. Many riders do not know of the classical school – if they knew about it they would love it
2. The test ride is just an examination with an expert to tell you how close/far you are from classical 'perfection' (but riders not schooling in classical tradition – they cut corners, speed up, train too fast, do not care about what

the horse feels, reacts, “the ego is fed a good meal, the horse is not fed an honest meal”.

The judges should honour the beautiful tradition they should be working in. The ego of the rider is glorified. “Vanity speeded up the process and made it a little false at times”.

Riding is for people who are mature – riding teaches you to be independent.

1. Riders – need self-awareness, need opportunism, positive, leader; no-one follows a pessimist, those who are victims, complainers – their life is horrible and need others to bail them out. Riders need no expectation of conditional collaboration, they give freely without expectation of reciprocal return – they do not need admirers but they like those they can inspire and those who inspire them. A mature person humbles himself and uses his power to enable others.
2. The mature rider has self-discipline, respect for others’ time and lives (they are not late). Consistently trying to produce good work, to focus on the task at hand and not compromise task at hand for future desire (i.e. its not about today’s pleasure at expense of later life – this attitude is prevailing in today’s society.
3. Empathy – ability/willingness to make allies out of potential protagonists (i.e. your horse). Put duty ahead of mood (inclination). If you follow only inclination – you go to hell (Faust) – i.e. you create your own hell.

Mature people:

Make decisions with others in mind

Never punish others for perceived wrong-doing

Gain respect – but respect is undemandable!

A mature person is generous with their time/energy and avoid hurting others; beautiful people can hurt others very easily i.e. if a beautiful person loves you, you are elevated more than if you are loved by a not beautiful person.

Looking at beauty – one can be overcome by ‘ecstasy’ – its so extreme, it can cause physical weakness.

When you have knowledge you need to analyse it – analysis leads you to a simplified version of truth – you can then understand it more deeply; when you can understand and use this knowledge to do good to others (including the horse) we call it wisdom.

When you sit in right posture, then you are in a meditative state – this state enables you to know how to sit and be *with* the horse.

~

Gerd Heuschman

Horizontal Balance

The backmover – desirable- able to take our weight as harmonious part of him. A backmover is in balance, impulsion of hindlegs makes back swing.

The legmover – has to carry us as a pack – i.e. not integrated. Legmover is a horse with tensed back - i.e. hyperflexed horse. Horse curls neck – it’s a reaction – back tenses and neck curls.

Bridge construction

Withers – as an important arm of leverage; need a long neck to allow longissimus dorsi to flex and allow back to carry.

Soft/good rider can sit on a horse with a tense back and allow it to relax.

Many riders cause a problem of stiffness and then fight the symptoms – i.e. rearing, not bending, not backing.

Problems under saddle area – transfers to problems in haunches and rear legs. The area we sit on is fundamental to the whole: if seat is poor → bouncing rider → horse resistance i.e. contact problems.

Hollenfer 1896 – book about work in the pillars – used the terms ‘back’ and ‘leg’ movers.

Bring your spine into the rhythm of the wave movement of the horse’s spine – when this is achieved it becomes a ‘spiritual experience’ (DW – not sure from this speaker?)

‘Legmovers’ = cockroach (CdK) – a set body with legs going like mad.

Lumbar/sacroiliac joint – if half-halt we should feel that the horse is closing from behind, not stopping at the front. This joint is so important – to make it free you have to make the horse go.

Steinbrecht – the higher the level of the horse’s training, the faster they are.

CdK – change – i.e. 4 steps forward, collect, forward, collect, back, forward.... – change is important. Can use change of

- Frame
- Stride length
- Bend

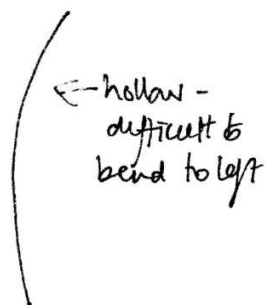
Start to bend as soon as have solid even contact.

Horse’s back problems = man made – bad riding mainly and some saddle problems.

Bridle/rein lameness – no horizontal balance. How can vets ignore 80kilo weight of rider on the horse everyday? Have learnt that if you can reduce the stiffness (i.e. by riding leg yield, or lateral steps) then lameness goes. (Read Udo Burger)

Vertical balance → natural crookedness – results from reduced ability to relax muscle system of chest and abdominal wall of hollow side.

Ride forward to get contact on both reins, then can give contact on outside rein, not pull on the inside rein – relax the stiff side (the hollow side):



The hollow side is difficult to stretch.

The more you ride the more important the outside aids are.

When the horse is supple, you get contact (it is given) – you cannot ‘take’ it.

Main mistake – riders pull on the rein on the stiff/hollow side.

Demonstration session

1. Dark Bay horse

Do not 'follow' with hand in walk – if you move your hands constantly, you cannot 'talk' to the hind legs.

When horse's shoulder goes forward, move your corresponding shoulder forward; use seat bone to push as shoulder moves.

Sit on buttocks not crotch

When move shoulders, give with buttocks and push front forwards

Upper arm/lower arm should form a right-angle; push from torso, not upper arm. When giving in this way, make sure you do not straighten the arm. Lean back and push a little.

Then slow the trot so much that you almost but not walk, then push.

2. Grey Iberian

Impulsion is to allow articulation of all joints of the horse.

Centre line, 3 steps leg yield and then shoulder-in – need to catch weight with outside leg.

When in shoulder in – again with 2 inch longer outside rein.

Yield 4 steps only, brake, yield, brake, yield.

Half pass, plie in canter.

4 strides halfpass away from wall, then bend (leg yield) to wall again.

Lean back and 'screw back inside shoulder, don't touch the mouth to collect canter.

4-bea canter – results often from using reins and not seat – surf the ride.

Lean behind the vertical to give 'more seat'.

All horses need more bend to halfpass right.

Halfpass 4 steps, shoulder-in 4 steps, halfpass 4 steps, – to right move right shoulder and right seat bone.

On circle – to raise the poll: slow the trot, give abruptly, drive with inside leg aggressively, retake.

Inside leg for rhythm and tempo

Outside leg to direct the haunches.

If you feel too much with the rein (i.e. try to frame him) he feels it in his hind legs – they start to have problems. Allow horse to find their own carriage.

From the rider's elbow forward belongs to the horse.

3. Grey TB eventer

To overcome resistance – hand level with mouth, feel mouth, give reins, take reins, and repeat. Some say to give reins completely and wait for horse to stretch and chew.

Resistance in poll, gently lift inside hands.

Changing rein through circle – makes the horse use the haunches. Worked in sitting trot then go to rising for a while to energise.

Hands need to be closed – then have more control over poll and haunch.

CdK – a pattern to make shoulder-in bend better : you diminish a circle to 10m in centre of arena. Here you try to imitate a turn-on-the-forehand – push outwards and then leg yield to

20m circle. Important that you must yield and take the inside rein – must use inside leg not rein – give inside rein so that horse can move correctly.



10 times per session – medium trot – horse needs to stretch sacroiliac joint – you need these muscles for collection. Play with tempo and frame in shoulder-in – longer and shorter steps.

Canter out of stretch – encourages back to stay good – just drop inside seat bone but keep chest open (aids to canter without using leg back).

Stretch in canter = best stretch available.

4. *Big chestnut dressage horse*

Shoulder-in to haunches-out

Shoulder-in to haunches-in

When you want to collect, collect yourself and the horse will follow.

Hand should be totally still (passive resistance), or yield

Piaffe – legs back, raise chest, don't touch reins, tap legs quickly to get steps. Pelvis must be straight.

CdK – rein is extension of the seat. If you want to strengthen the contact with the rein, then think 'pelvis to hand'.

Resist with pelvis by pushing tummy forward, relax tummy to yield.

Bitless – communication only with poll and nose – the jaw is not involved. Bitless riding is not in contact. Contact is with lower jaw.

GH – tree-less saddle is absolutely a no-go.

When you undertake the 1,2,3 (slow down, release, drive) exercise to stop the horse 'curling' – you must slow down because this helps to focus on rear end.