

American Dressage Legends: Col. Bengt Ljungquist

The Swedish coach brought medals, judge training to US dressage

Not all members of the Romenor Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame are Americans. Several foreign individuals have been inducted in recognition of their extraordinary efforts to further the sport of dressage in the US.



TEAM LEADER: *USET dressage coach Col. Bengt Ljungquist in an undated photo*

One such notable is the late Col. Bengt Ljungquist (1912-1979) of Sweden, who entered the Hall of Fame in 1998. A remarkable man who attained Olympic-level excellence in not one but two sports, Ljungquist not only helped US dressage break a 28-year Olympic-medal drought but also

taught legions of American riders and helped to establish our nation's acclaimed system of judge training.

Born into a Swedish military family, Ljungquist continued the family tradition by joining the Swedish Army after he completed secondary school. In 1934 he received his cavalry commission, which he resigned in 1939, along with many of his fellow officers, to fight for Finland in its two-year conflict with the invading Soviet Union, known as the Winter War.

After the Winter War, Ljungquist returned to the Swedish military, where he studied and had a tour of duty as an instructor at the Military Academy Karlberg. In 1955, he was promoted to commander of the Royal Horse Guards and stationed in Stockholm. As part of his military duties,

Ljungquist organized the equestrian competition at the 1956 Stockholm Olympic Games.

Ljungquist, who began riding at the age of ten, was an active dressage competitor throughout his military career. He won the Swedish Dressage Championship six times. He was the team reserve rider for the 1960 Rome Games and represented his country at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, aboard Karat. The multit talented Ljungquist was even more famous in international circles as a fencer than as an equestrian, earning a reserve fencing world championship title and competing on several Swedish Olympic fencing teams.

When the cavalry was mechanized, Ljungquist began a career as a civilian dressage trainer and instructor. During a visit with his sister to the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, he made a trip to the US that sparked his interest in furthering dressage in the States. In 1969, he was invited to teach dressage at the Foxcroft School in Virginia. On that same trip, he gave a clinic at Lake Erie (OH) College Equestrian Center. That involvement led to other lessons and clinics,



HIS FINEST HOUR: *Ljungquist coached the 1976 US dressage team (Hilda Gurney/Keen, Edith Master/Dahlwitz, and Dorothy Morkis/Monaco) to Olympic team bronze*

and later he began training out of future FEI "O" (now 5*) judge and fellow USDF Hall of Famer Linda Zang's Idlewilde Farm in Davidsonville, MD.

Numerous notable dressage riders made the trip to Idlewilde to study with Ljungquist, who later became the US dressage-team coach, a position he held from 1974 to 1978. In 1974, he brought the US squad to the attention of the European dressage community when he coached World Championships competitors Elizabeth Lewis on Ludmilla, Edith Master on Dahlwitz, John Winnett on Leopardi, and Sidney Payne on Felix. At the 1975 Pan American Games in Mexico, the US dressage team won the gold medal and also brought home individual silver (Hilda Gurney/Keen), individual bronze (Dorothy Morkis/Monaco), and a fourth-place individual finish for John Winnett on Leopardi. But as a coach Ljungquist is best known for producing the bronze-medal-winning dressage team at the 1976 Montreal Olympics: Hilda Gurney/Keen, Dorothy Morkis/Monaco, and Edith Master/Dahlwitz.

An advocate for dressage-judge education, Ljungquist helped to develop a training program for the Potomac Valley Dressage Association, a USDF charter GMO. The PVDA program became the model for most judges' training programs in the US. In 1976 Ljungquist published his *Practical Dressage Manual*, which remains a modern equestrian classic.

Longtime PVDA member and former USDF president Sam Barish established the Col. Bengt Ljungquist Memorial Championships, which were first held in 1983. These prestigious regional championships, which continue today, honor Ljungquist and his contributions to US dressage, and

particularly to PVDA and the Mid-Atlantic dressage community.

USDF Connection is pleased to bring you a classic training article by Col. Ljungquist. Read on for his thoughts and advice on riding the leg-yield, which at the time of publication in 1973 had not yet been included in the national dressage tests. Ljungquist was in favor of doing so, and he wrote this article to explain his position.

LEG-YIELDING

By Col. Bengt Ljungquist

As I am a proponent of leg-yielding, I have been asked to write an essay in its favor because of the heated polemic currently surrounding its practice. This essay should, by all rights, be written by the FEI Dressage Committee, of which the members Niemack (Germany), Gromova (Soviet Union) and Nyblaus (Sweden) were unanimously in favor of the proposal to introduce leg-yielding in the FEI rules. However, I will speak in agreement with their side of this issue as it concerns American dressage.

This is the first time I have had to argue about the value of this exercise, and I think the discussion deals more with definitions than with facts and purposes. As leg-yielding is a suppling exercise, it can be practiced before the horse is ready for the collected exercises, shoulder-in and two tracks. The introduction of leg-yielding is made to improve, not to mar the rider's capabilities to train and develop their horses in the right sequence. It is not, for instance, a substitute for the half-pass. But it is impossible to reach the real top level of training if some of the vital phases are omitted.

I am, naturally, biased because of my equestrian education. Every single Swedish horse, including the Army remounts at the time when there were horses in the Army, was suppled and made obedient to the aids by leg-yielding. At the Olympic Games from 1912 to 1972, the record shows that

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Swedish horses and riders have been quite successful, so leg-yielding can't possibly have damaged the horses too much. Leg-yielding is included in the Swedish lower level tests. Then, in the medium tests, shoulder-in, travers and on two tracks are introduced, as well as single flying changes.

In leg-yielding, the horse moves away from the leg. He is slightly bent at the poll and almost straight along the spine. The purpose of leg-yielding is:

a) To make the horse obedient to the cooperative aids (leg and hand on the same side), thus suppling him and preparing him for the shoulder-in, travers and on two tracks

b) To teach the rider to use the aids.

Without obedience to the leg, it is impossible to supple, flex, bend, collect or straighten the horse. Further, how can a rider teach a horse obedience to the leg without lateral work?

The turn on the forehand is a good basic exercise, but it should be combined with leg-yielding to maintain and create the willingness to go for-

ward. A horse which resists the rider's hands is generally disobedient or dead to the rider's legs. The first thing to do then, is to make the horse obedient to the legs in order to loosen up the resistance and establish an elastic contact between the rider's hands and the horse's mouth. Leg-yielding is a good means to establish this contact.

Speaking as an instructor, I don't know of a better means to develop the rider's skill in coordinating and strengthening the aids. If the rider doesn't use the inside leg with enough emphasis, the horse doesn't move and the rider must use stronger aids or perhaps a tap with the whip to begin with. If the rider doesn't use the outside leg sufficiently, the horse will overbend and so on. Simply travelling around the track of the arena doesn't improve the rider's capability to communicate with the horse very much.

Leg-yielding can be ridden in several patterns or following several plans (see Figures 1-3):

a) Away from the long side of the arena

- b) Away from the long side and back to the long side
- c) Along the long side
- d) Across the diagonals
- e) On circles.

When riding across the diagonal in the leg-yield (Fig. 3), the horse's willingness to go forward can be controlled and encouraged by going more freely forward on the center line. To ride leg-yielding on a circle, the rider can spiral inward to a smaller circle and then push the horse out to the larger circle in leg-yielding.

The easiest way to teach the horse this exercise is to move him away from the long side of the arena (Fig. 1). After the corner, make a soft half-halt and bend the horse slightly to the left. You should see the superciliary arch above the eye and the nostril. Increase the pressure of your left (inside) leg behind the girth. The position of this inside leg, however, should be flexible, behind the girth if the haunches are dragging, on the girth if the forehand resists. The inside (left) leg, if necessary, is supported by the left rein (toward the body or

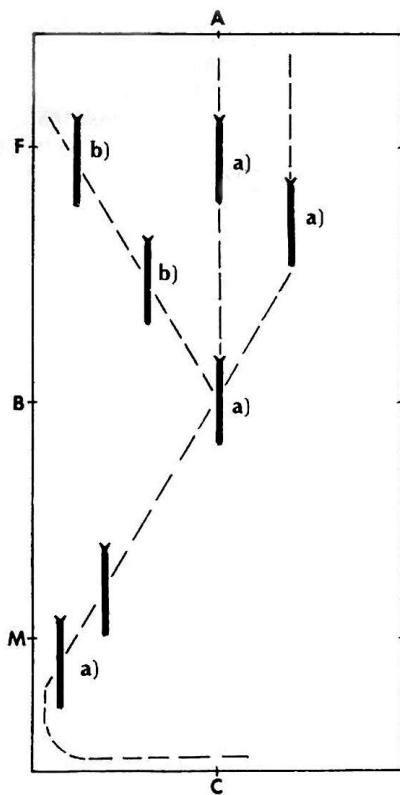


FIG. 1

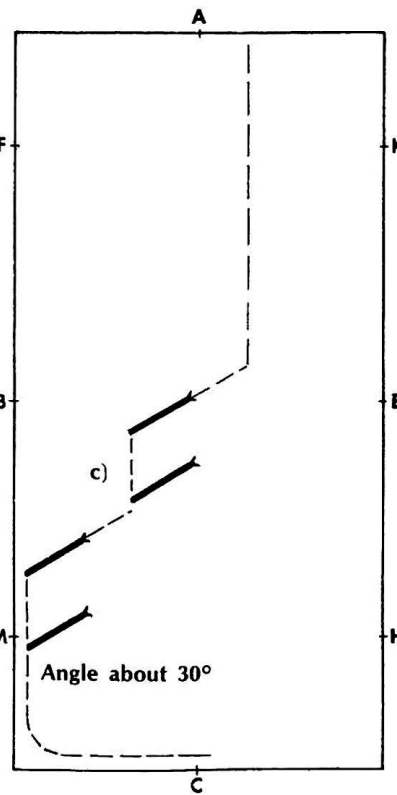


FIG. 2

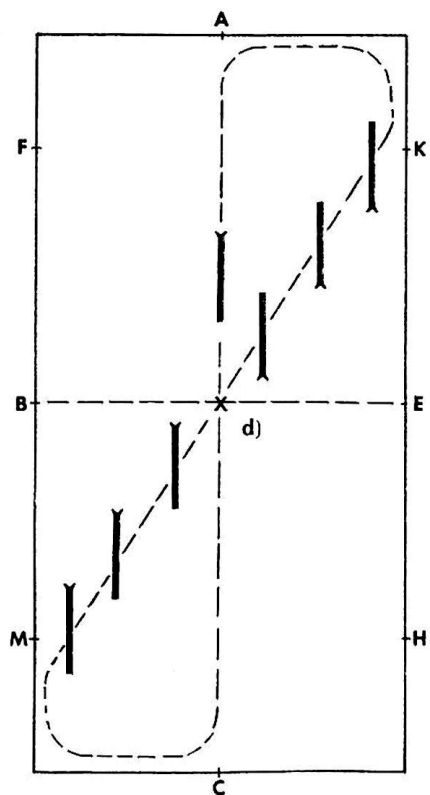


FIG. 3

toward the left hip—never across the mane). The correct time to use this leg, to squeeze with it, is when the horse's left hind leaves the ground.

The outside (right) rein leads the horse (still slightly bent to the left) away from the long side. The outside (right) leg on the girth keeps him straight and prevents him, in combination with the right rein, from overbending and from escaping the pressure of the left leg. It is very important here to keep the outside leg close to the horse. Also, the weight of the rider should remain over the middle of the horse. (A common fault is to collapse the inside hip.) Then, when the rider wants the horse to go straight forward, he reduces the pressure of the inside leg, increases the pressure of the outside leg and urges the horse forward with both legs.

Only a few strides should be required in the beginning, whereupon the rider goes forward and resumes the exercise (see Fig. 1a). If too many strides are required, the horse's willingness to go forward can be lost. He should be almost parallel to the long side of the arena in this exercise; the shoulders, however, should be leading slightly. Leg-yielding should be started at the walk, and later on, it should be preferably ridden at the trot to maintain impulsion. It is important, too, in leg-yielding at either gait, to maintain a steady rhythm. Thus, the obedience and suppleness is gradually developed until the horse obeys light, invisible aids and moves in a supple, balanced way, either away from the long side or along the long side. When this goal is achieved, it is easy to develop two tracks and shoulder-in.

As to the question of why leg-yielding should be included in the national dressage tests, I will answer simply and sum up the points I have made thus far. Leg-yielding is the first step in lateral work and a preparation for shoulder-in, travers, and work on two tracks. If we agree that shoulder-in should be introduced at Third Level when the collected trot is required, should there be no lateral

work at First and Second Levels? [Editor's note: USEF dressage tests now introduce shoulder-in and collected trot at Second Level.] In my opinion, there should be some sort of lateral work before Third Level to prepare the horse for the collected lateral work, to show the suppleness and obedience of the horse and the skill of the rider.

If leg-yielding is included in the tests, the riders must practice it in their work at home. It will make the horses more obedient to the aids, compel

them to step with the inside hind leg farther forward in order to cross over and in front of the outside hind leg. At the same time, the exercise will develop the riders' capability to influence and communicate with their mounts. At the beginning, of course, we will see many bad performances with overbent horses and a lack of willingness to go forward. But these negative sides will gradually be counterbalanced by more knowledge and skill, and the overall picture will improve. ▲

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