

BOOK REVIEW

It's Never Too Late

to learn, to improve, to make
a difference in your riding!

By Holly Mason

Softcover; 155 pages.

Reviewed by Mary Daniels

Approach this self-published book as a series of notebooks, which the author, a graphic designer by trade, has kept over 25 years of learning about dressage. It begins with “My Background Story” a 25-page personal and professional history. Next is a chapter on “Integrated Thinking”, an introduction to biomechanical theory and the science of learning.

There are a few books out on the physics of riding, or balance in motion, and Mason adds clear, simple applicable expansions to this developing area of knowledge. “Integrated Thinking” is replete with drawings of motor neurons, equine brains (shockingly small, the size of a fist) human brains, memory synapses and brain chemicals. “Position is Everything” is next followed by “The Convergence of Theory and Technique.”

What I found most intriguing in the entire opus is where Mason describes a visit to the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, accompanied by her husband, a jazz drummer. Watching the famous Arthur Kottas ride, her husband leans over and tells his wife that Kottas’ “sense of rhythm is so profound”. Mason adds that Kottas “rode with a pulse that the horse responded to due to his clear feel for the rhythm.” This, too, helped me to understand what the author was trying to accomplish in this book: how to achieve the Vienna vision through understanding balance in motion and how rhythm plays a key role. It goes

something like this: If you don’t know where your hands go on a keyboard, how can you begin to produce rhythm, then music? The same analogy applies to the rider’s seat in the saddle.

To help riders sit in the middle of the horse, for example, she says to balance back to front and side to side, which most of us already know, at least intellectually. To get there, she uses what she calls “East West Shoulders.” There is an oval of bones that sits on the top of your rib cage and, if you widen this oval, you will feel how nicely this sets your neck and head correctly on your spine, she says. “It prevents the back from arching and makes the arms hang at your sides with elbows back.” East West Shoulders – like a compass, neither hand goes in advance of the other – is an antidote to the way most people ride, with the right shoulder advanced and thus the left side of the pelvis trailing back in the saddle.

Another useful image: Keep your coccyx, or tailbone, aimed forward toward the horse’s mane except when doing lateral work.

Mason writes extensively about what she calls the “tired language of dressage instruction” and the need to update it. “The Road to Inside Leg into Outside Rein” explains, with wonderful clarity, how to master the timing of the horse’s inner hind leg by feeling his rib cage. It illuminates how rhythm is the royal road to connecting horse and human brains.

