

## Performance Test for Academy Horses

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Since the decision of the KNN General Assembly, not to make jumping compulsory for the baroque/classical Knabstrupper any more, my hopes are rising to get the KNN much more attractive for the academic riders and their horses.

It would only be fitting if in the country of origin of the modern academic riding and in the birth country of the most famous ever Knabstrupper, Hugin of Denmark, whose part in the rise of the academies and the new interest in Knabstrupper horses has been quite big, also a well-adapted performance test would be conducted.

Emboldened through the publications in the Knabstrupper Nyt this is to prepare the judges, the test rider and myself as a rider/owner for the first baroque type performance test of the KNN ever (maybe the first one in Germany ever?) here are my suggestions:

At first an introduction to the reasons, why the academy riders need changes at all:

### The most important goal of the academic art of riding is to sustain the horse's grace

Grace means here the beauty of the horse's movements through sustaining it's unconstrainedness, vivacity and naturalness and also it's joy at living and at the playful work with the rider. The horse shall be moved by only the most sparingly use of aids, at the end of it's education merely through the rider's good seat resp. from the ground through the handler's body language. Without grace no royal horse!

For the academy rider in the course of his education it is therefore getting more and more secondary, if his horse performs a specific reaction instantly and perfectly. It may be a far greater experience, if in some situations it might react in another way than intended, because at that moment other priorities are seen by the horse: a young horse for example is far easier distracted and reacts to the aids much more sensitive; also, if having been given contradicting aids, it shall inform the rider promptly!

So it is not rare that on looking academy riders smile benevolently when a horse reacts differently: for them it's a sign that the horse's will has not been broken, but to the contrary, has been strengthened.

An academically oriented rider learns in the course of his life increasingly to ask himself before an hastened try for correction:

What is the reason for the horse's unexpected behaviour?

1. Is it the situation? (Illness or muscle pain of the horse? Unrest in the surroundings? Bad mood of the rider? Weather change? etc.)
2. Is it a reaction to my actions? (False seat? Wrong, possibly even contradictory aids? Wrong moment of applying the aids?)
3. Is my horse already capable to understand me? (New lesson? Insufficient former explanation from the ground?)
4. Is my horse already capable to perform the movement? (Young age? Insufficient training bodily and psychologically?)

Malignancy and antagonism are words a developing academy rider with growing education doesn't use anymore as explanation for an unintended way of performing!  
Increasingly the rider dispenses with provoking his horse to show that he can subjugate it, he tries to educate his horse as disturbing-free as possible. Therefore he is glad if there are no other riders in the arena and if there is no distracting noise, e.g. music around. In contrast to the horse show rider, being at another place every weekend, most academy horses are not used to this as much by far.

**The second highest priority** in the academic art of riding is to push the load from forehead to hind legs, the so called "**Setting on the haunches**"

The forelegs have only supporting functions and are exposed to much more unsoftened movement shocks (and consecutively damage) than the hind legs, which are able to cushion much more weight due to the angling of their joints. For this reason the academy rider strives to develop the hind leg action by letting the hind legs step under further to the front and reducing their push back out.

Similar as for the sustaining of the grace here also the greatest possible calmness in the horse is essential, any goading on of the flight instinct is counterproductive, i.e. racing, time pressure for lessons, the show parcours jumping or any other training leading to hectic act against this aim. Pace variations like middle or even strong trot, hunting gallop are seen not as helpful, too.

This also is the reason, why in the academic training no chasing of the horse weather on the longe or even free in the arena is used! In the baroque era not the fastest, but the one who could canter the slowest was seen as the best rider!

The reward for the rider is a very comfortably to sit, calm and very safe utility horse.

**Another important goal** of academy riders is **the best possible protection of the horse's mouth**

Humans, being hand prone creatures, need a fine and lively horse mouth at least in the early years of education as a very important communication tool. Any disturbance of the mouth's action and sensitivity results in heavy consequences which will lead to setbacks of many months or not seldom years!

To prevent this as far as possible, the academy rider uses a cavecon. Used by the experienced rider almost exclusively as a soft guiding tool to place the head and lead to the forward-downwards movement, it supports the learning rider (who very often begins on an uneducated horse, too!), because it can keep very much pressure off the horse's mouth.

If the rider is a little bit experienced already, he might add relatively early, perhaps after one year, a small part of the rein aids to a curb bit (adding to a cavecon, a broken bit has only relative small benefits as both have nearly equal effects) and ride with two pairs of reins.

The optimal tension on the reins is said "to equal the feeling of cutting through smooth butter with a thread". The posture of the head with putting the mouth downwards and elevating the highest point of the nape, which is desired in many cases, should be the result nearly only of the weight of curb and the attached reins in combination with the driving aids: "The horse is carrying itself".

The freeing from the hand is supported also by neatly aimed leg's aids, which sometimes afford the use of the spurs and the mostly upright held whip. The whip is held out of the horse's field of vision as long it is not used to signal s.th.: this way the horse stays sensitive to it and one seldom needs to physically touch the horse with it. Both instruments are important to achieve a good reaction!

### **The academic education is unhurried**

In Barock und Renaissance, at the peak of the art of riding, a six year old horse still was seen as a foal and until this age was not worked fully. As the field canter/working canter in the arena was seen as rather counterproductive, one often waited here until the horse could perform the passage well (although it would be the mostly 4-tacted school canter then).

### **Consequences for a Performance Test of Baroque Type Horses**

Summed up the following peculiarities at the performance test of a horse which will be, or already is educated in the academic art of riding are important:

1. Baroque horses tend to be of square build, and is the horse small enough to allow the riders hips to relate to the swinging of the horse's movements easily and comfortably, there is no need to disturb it's rhythm and equilibrium by a rising trot. Many academic horses have never been ridden this way!
2. Whereas pace extensions are seen as not important in these horses the ability for collection is an important breeding goal. The testing for this, of course, has to be done accordingly to the horse's age and stage of education. The assessing of pace extensions on the other hand will be of limited value, as they might never have been trained.
3. The field canter/working canter in the arena will be underdeveloped. Is the horse trained very well and for a long time by a very good rider, it might be possible to show the 4-tacted school canter instead,
4. The rider naturally wants to show his horse using the tack both are used to for gaining the best result possible. A test rider (Assessor) either must know how to use it or be aware that the result on i.e. a broken bit might not show the horse's optimum.
5. If the education has been done well, the horse will show itself lively and gracefully, and therefore sometimes might perform in an unintended way. An academically ridden horse is allowed to stop the execution of a lesson, if it is feels not up to it! This is a sign of trust in it's rider!

Therefore I propose the new phrasing of paragraph 24 as follows:

§24

**One Day Performance Assessment of Animals Assessed according to the Classical Standard**

Horses of classical/baroque type will be tested according to the KNN rules for the one day performance test with the following exemptions:

- 1 The **judging of the paces** proceeds according to the breeding criteria for the baroque/classical type and by classical judges. The owner shall point out to the judges if a training of pace extensions has not been performed, as they are seen as not useful in the academic art of riding. With these horses also, if possible and desired by the owner, the field/working canter should be judged not (or not only) in the arena, but (or additionally) at the endurance test. The owner should tell the judges and the test rider, if the horse is not used to a rising trot.
- 2 **Tack:** At the endurance test and during the dressage part the horse is allowed to the tack it is used to: i.e. a broken bit or a hackamore or cavemore or a cavecon solo or in tandem with a curb bit (the latter leading to a second pair of reins) or a curb bit solo, held in one hand.
- 3 **Blunt spurs and a whip** may be worn simultaneously.
- 4 **No jumping tests are compulsory.**
- 5 **The test rider** is not allowed in any circumstances to punish the horse! Under no circumstances the test rider is allowed the hard pulling or sudden jerking at the reins so many riders are using to produce maximum pain in the mouth!  
If he won't succeed in trying to achieve a specific response, it sometimes will be better to leave it unperformed and disqualify the horse lest he places unduly stress on it (several academic horses will never have been ridden by another rider before!), but certainly he might ask the horse owner to tell him the aids (for example the important vocal aids) the horse is used to and try again.  
Also the test rider shall use the spurs and whip only sparingly and slightly.  
An academically ridden horse is allowed to stop a lesson should it feel not up to it, this is sign of the horse's trust in the rider!
- 6 **Surroundings:** The horse owner may demand for the duration of the presentation the absence of other horses in the arena and of any noise, e.g. music.

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