

The Scales of Training

When building a house that is expected to stand for many years the builders use a plan. This plan will start with the foundations and progress upwards to the roofline. A modern house with no foundations would not be expected to last, and without a plan the outcome would probably be haphazard.

Many people begin to school their ponies and horse without a plan of progression and without any foundations in place, the result is almost certainly haphazard and unreliable.

Germany has for many years followed a plan, called The Scales of Training, which has produced Olympic Champions and hundreds of other well trained horses, that are a pleasure to ride and reliable under the stress of competition.

Each of the scales acts as foundation or prerequisite for the next, so when the first scale is in place the horse is ready to begin working on the next.

Rhythm: The regularity of the beat within the gait. Until a horse or pony can trot or canter in a regular rhythm it is almost impossible for it to improve any other part of its way of going.

Suppleness: Both from side to side, left and right and longitudinally so the pony can begin to work in a rounded shape, and does not try to resist when the rider gives an aid.

Contact: Does the weight of reins feel the same into both hands? Does it feel elastic? Is there more weight into one hand or the other, or is the horse will be bearing down on your hands? The hind legs should be connected by a band of muscles along the back, neck and poll allowing the rider to feel the forward energy into equally into both hands.

Impulsion: the energy the horse or pony steps forwards with, whilst maintaining his balance. The first scale just has rhythm, this scale has rhythm and balance and energy, because the hind legs are further under the body enabling the horse to spring forwards easily.

Straightness: as the horse or pony becomes more supple, balanced and energetic it will find it easier to work straight, so within every movement the hind legs will follow in the tracks the front ones have created.

Collection: Once the pony or horse has all the previous scales in place he is able to balance himself better and better, and can now take more of his, and your, weight over his hind legs, and perform with greater power.

These scales also apply to jumping; it is very handy to have a horse that can collect when approaching a big fence off a tight corner!