

► BETWEEN ROUNDS WITH:

JEREMY STEINBERG

We All Have A Responsibility To Make Dressage Sustainable

A strong future for the sport requires long-term thinking.

Sustainability is a hot topic these days. You hear the word connected to recycling, farming, water usage, resources, and anything of the like. I'm always interested to learn what makes whatever it is I'm about to consume sustainable.

"Locally farmed" and "farm-to-table" are also sayings you hear tossed around more and more in reference to restau-

rants, and I prefer to frequent these places. If I'm eating food that was locally raised, I'm helping support my local farmers, who in turn help support my own friends' and family's businesses. A farm-to-table restaurant takes a long-term business model, links it up with a farming community, and creates a more collaborative, family-style business that I find attractive and want to support.

My old riding teacher used to say, "The right hand washes the left." Survival is based on that symbiosis and is mutually beneficial. I like to think of it as a consumer-driven capitalistic "community," where we're working together for financial success based on a common buyer or user who dictates need.

How can the concept of a more sustainable equestrian scene, specifically dressage, be accomplished, and what do we need to do to produce that? Are horses a resource we might run out of? Probably not. But trained horses and educated, thinking riders who can do the training are a limited resource.

Sustainability in the dressage world means teaching people the skills required to train horses to Grand Prix, and it also means taking the time ourselves to train and bring more horses up to the Grand Prix level in addition to educating the people around us. Olympic medals are great,

"As a trainer, it's your job to uphold a tradition of good sportsmanship and, even more so, good horsemanship," says Jeremy Steinberg.

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but if we have to keep buying them, is that a sustainable future for any country?

We all need to do our part as judges, sponsors, riders, trainers and educators to keep the growth happening. Otherwise, we as a group are contributing to our own demise. I look at each group from above and ask: What are you doing to add to the growth or sustainability of our sport, and what are you doing for the long-term health of the art?

The Trainers' Responsibility

As a trainer, it's your job to uphold a tradition of good sportsmanship and, even more so, good horsemanship. That means not being in a rush, not cutting corners, not doing it for the money, and remembering, in the end, that you are responsible for upholding and continuing a long-held tradition of art. It's an amazing job.

The blending of art and sport leads to demonizing and idolizing any particular rider on any given day. You as a trainer are watched, judged and regarded, so your actions have consequences. Your training style can influence many people in a short period of time, as can your system of teaching or belief in a method or technique. What you say is published, quoted, repeated, and either revered or reviled. Some of you write books, some of you teach, some of you compete, and many combine all of the above and more.

When we sell a horse, we send a picture of our soul out into the world. What you sell, what you train, and what you send home with a client is a part of you and in some small way is a work of art you're displaying for the public to examine. Are you doing your part to make sure what you're putting out in the world, what you pass on, and what you create are things that will continue to uphold a tradition of good horsemanship and good equitation?

The sustainability responsibility as a trainer is creating generations of horses and riders who produce art and horsemanship and who also have the ability to help blend that into sport. You are the upholder of a long-held traditional artistic genre that can't be allowed to die off. Are you doing your part?

▶ Young Horses Are As Dangerous As We Make Them

As a side note, the argument that young horses aren't safe is a poor excuse for top riders not to train them. If riders don't want to take risks on babies, then they need to slow down their approach and take more time.

Horses are unpredictable and inherently dangerous at any level. Young horses in and of themselves aren't more dangerous than any other trained horse. When we push them or overly stress them, yes, they will panic, and yes, they can hurt you, but the majority of the time when people get hurt around a horse it's pure accident.

Accidents happen at all stages

of training and life with horses. As riders and educators it's our responsibility to watch for the warning signs that can lead to problems and avoid certain risk factors that elevate danger.

Young horses bring into the equation an aspect of the unknown, but if you take the time to really work them in properly, teach and educate them on correct behavior and response, this added risk doesn't elevate to an alarming level. Older riders don't bounce as well as younger ones, but in the end, a well-rounded and educated rider should be able to ride or train a horse at any level.

Riders' Choices Matter

Whether you're a professional or an amateur, how are you contributing to sustainability? Are you frequenting shows that have good footing, stabling and conditions for your horse and, by doing so, doing your part to help those shows survive? Or are you going to shows based on judges who are generous or proximity to your home?

It's our job as riders to be advocates for our horses' health. Do you work with instructors who take care of your horse as an individual and do not put your or their needs above your horses'? Or do you work with individuals who can further your riding ambitions regardless of their attitude toward your horse?

Sometimes the two meet, and other times they don't. Sometimes as riders we have much higher ambitions than are realistic for our equine partners, and it's our responsibility to know those limits. It's important in our medal quests—USDF, Olympic or otherwise—not to jeopardize the health, welfare or soundness, both mental and physical, of our partners.

Your job in creating sustainable growth is in the care you take in the riding you do. It's in the stress you

put on the horses and the systems implemented around them. Do you continually challenge the judges until you find one who scores you the way you want, or do you listen to the educators who are guiding your training by offering an outside vantage into your day-to-day work?

Your job is to listen if you're told you are too hard on your horse, learn to sit well, care when the footing is bad, speak up when a horse is treated unfairly, humbly accept the guidance you're given, and challenge only when you know you're in the right. Do you show when you're ready or because it's the show season? Do you show because of what it can do for you, or are you showing to display your art?

For a rider, a sustainable future is one that's collaborative with the trainers, riders and peers around you. It's a future where within all the resources you have, limited or large, you are your own horses' advocate. You care and show the utmost respect for the art and the beast while knowing the burden is yours to carry. You show them off, not the other way around.

Are you doing your part, or is your horse the one with the burden? ▶

Judging Is A Difficult Job

Without question, judges have one of the toughest jobs. Without blinking, without thought, through reaction alone, we demand instantaneous feedback from them, like a computer, about the performance playing out in front of them. The blending of the art to sport is a gray area they are responsible for overseeing and protecting.

Their job is to decide within seconds whether a movement fits the basic criteria and has been done in harmony, yet with brilliance; has a calm air, but power; has grace, with strength and elasticity; while holding a fairly rigid form.

As a community we criticize, we scold, and we condemn if we don't agree, and often we bully and push to change an opinion or sway a thought. We undermine, coerce, manipulate and sneak our beliefs and thoughts onto those that judge and pretend it goes

unnoticed. We are all guilty.

The judges have a hard job. That being said, it *is* their job and responsibility to make the right decision. To be awake and not blink and to sit on the edge of their seats every ride and not lose focus. They reward or punish the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, in equitation as well as movement.

Equitation is also a dying art that needs a champion. Use and effect of aids can't be overlooked if we want to create future generations of quiet-handed, invisible-aid wielding riders. It's not the judges' job to train the riders, but it is their job to guide them and reward or punish them accordingly.

Why is a nice-sitting, still rider with a deep seat and quiet hands a rider we ooh and aah over instead of the standard? Why are quiet riders whose legs don't bounce, whose seats are soft, whose hips swing, whose spurs don't

job, whose toes turn in instead of out and go up instead of down such an anomaly?

Judges, are you challenging their way of thinking or just rewarding their huge moving horses? Do you have a rider score decided based on a name before they enter the arena, or are you scoring what you see?

You are the ones we look to as guides and the ones who shape and change the landscape of the artistic movement. Are you doing your part? Are you criticizing or leading? Do you have a clear vision of where we are heading? Where can we never compromise, and where do we have to evolve? We look to you to uphold the standard of the form, remind us of its past, lead us to its future and guide us along the way.

Sponsorships Are About Giving And Receiving

How does sustainability affect sponsorship, and how does that relationship work in reverse? We have to look at both ends of the deal—the receiving end and the giving.

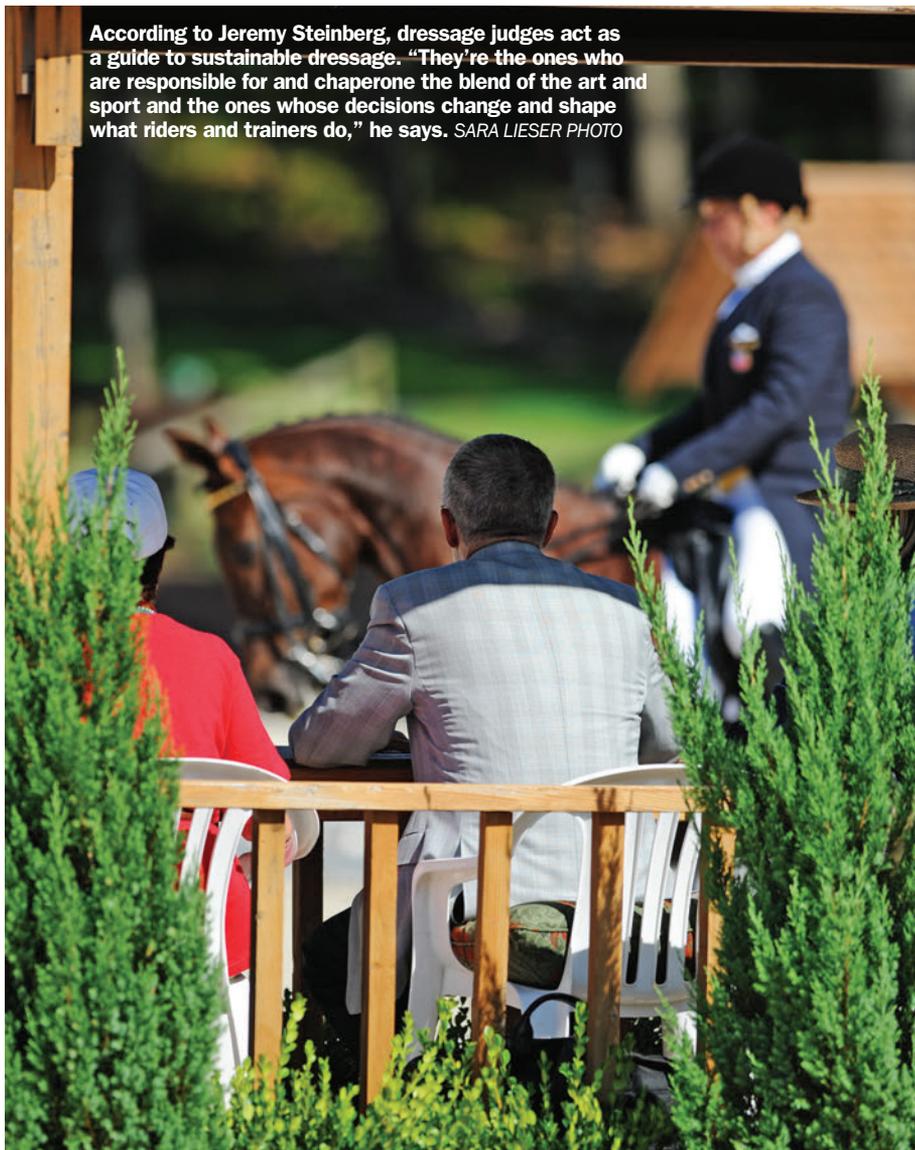
Everywhere I turn, people are talking about sponsorship: individual, corporate, small business (equine and other), horses or products, full rides or otherwise. Very few are financial, but most are comparable. A horse, some equipment, a product or services all have a cash value that anyone contributing to a team or combination understands. Do all riders really understand this?

On the receiving end, what are you doing to make the sponsorship work for you, to continue to train horses and riders and progress dressage through the ages?

It sounds silly to say a saddle pad sponsorship helps me produce a better quality horse, but it does. I was fortunate to recently receive a new sponsorship on a product I use in my daily horse life. I've used it for years and will continue to use it tomorrow even if they drop me today. I believe in it, love it and wouldn't work my horses without it.

The sponsorship covers about \$200-\$300 worth of product per month that I would purchase otherwise. When I put the saved money into my savings account, the product sponsorship becomes a cash one, because I'm paying

According to Jeremy Steinberg, dressage judges act as a guide to sustainable dressage. "They're the ones who are responsible for and chaperone the blend of the art and sport and the ones whose decisions change and shape what riders and trainers do," he says. SARA LIESER PHOTO





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myself what I would've spent each month. Whether I use it to buy a new horse or pay for extra training, shows or travel expenses, I've just made it that much easier to accomplish my goals.

If you receive a similar sponsorship, what are you doing to sustain your future? Did you pay off a credit card with the extra funds, or are you saving for a trip to Gladstone so you don't have to ask for more sponsorship to show there? Are you driving an expensive car, yet asking for help? Do you own designer shoes but no horse? You are your own sponsor, so what are you doing to keep yourself and your funding sustainable for your future?

On a giving end, why are you in it? Are you supporting an artist or a machine? Is it so your name or your horses or your products appear in magazines? Where do you put stress: show ring success, good horsemanship, or the combination of the two? Are you helping to produce a rider who is also creating a more sustainable future for dressage? Do you want to give a rider one trained horse and push them on a team, or do you buy your rider five young horses and teach them to become

self-sufficient and, in turn, give back to the bigger picture of our future in the sport?

I go back to the old adage, "If you give a man a fish, he eats for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime." It can also be said, "If you give a man a fish, he eats for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, he can feed a village." Is your rider helping the village eat or teaching others to fish along his or her path to the podium?

I'd like to challenge horse-owning sponsors. If you're in it for the long run, next time you're in a position to buy one of our top riders a horse, take the money you'd spend on one phenomenally trained horse and put it into a few 3- and 4-year-olds instead. Ask your rider to produce world-class horses. Start a pipeline with many horses coming up.

Many riders do it, but it's not the norm in America. If you have horses that don't end up filling that world-class mold, sell them. Add back to your bank account and ask the riders to help sustain the funds that are making all this possible.

Add horses to the U.S. economy for the amateurs to ride, the young riders

to learn on, and the lesser-educated trainers to gain experience on and confidence from. We want to become a world power in dressage; we need to have a surplus of horses to do this. We want a sustainable future; we need to start producing from within.

Challenge your riders. You believe in them, as you should. They should believe in themselves and be producing, not just riding. Think about the sustainability of your endeavors and work in collaboration with your riders to help America grow.

Adding To The Pool

One top rider on one top horse cannot be the hopes of the country; our hopes have to lie in many top riders training many horses and riders to the top levels.

If we want to become a country with a broad base and a sustainable future, have a global impact, and be an international force on the dressage scene, we need to start training a surplus of horses to the FEI levels and in turn create a surplus of riders and trainers who can do the same.

Our country is hungry for dressage success, and it's starving to death in a land of equine wealth and opulence. We don't have enough riders fishing, while a few select riders continue to eat.

At any one moment, we can be adding to the future or taking away from its long-term success. We are all the custodians of the horse, the sport, the art and the future of things to come. 🐾

JEREMY STEINBERG

Jeremy Steinberg was the U.S. Equestrian Federation Youth Coach from 2010-2014. He's a well-known rider, trainer and competitor based out of Del Mar, Calif. He's also a selector for the Developing Horse Program and one of five clinicians who works with the U.S. Dressage Federation in its Platinum Performance/USDF junior and young rider clinic series. He worked with long-time friend and mentor Dietrich von Hopfgarten extensively until his passing in 2004. Jeremy has trained and shown many horses up through the Grand Prix level. He now runs a small "boutique"-type training business and travels the country giving clinics. More information can be found at steinbergdressage.com.



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