

**Erika Tighe presents:**

# The Benefits of Dressage and How to Prepare the Icelandic Horse for the Dressage Ring

- Using dressage techniques to create a more supple, adjustable horse
- When and why to use lateral movements
- Expanding your showing opportunities

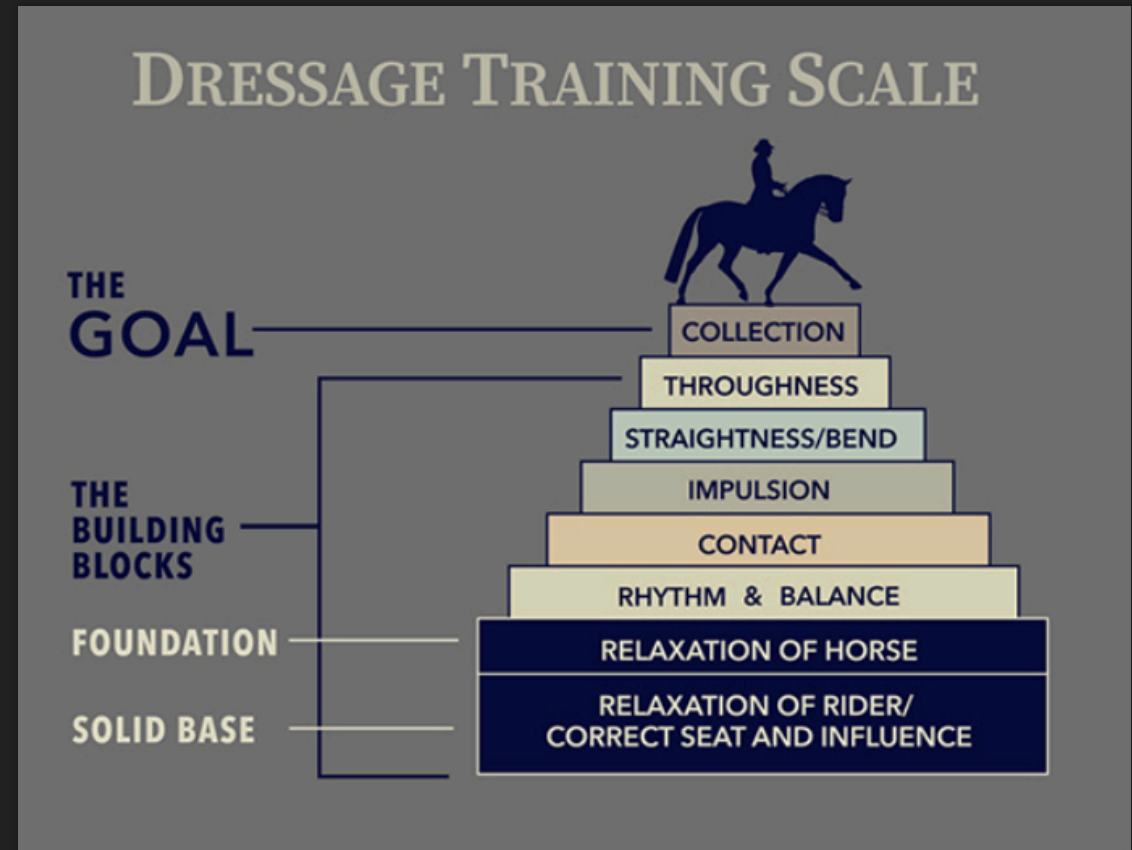
## Bio



- MA licensed and certified riding instructor with 15 years experience riding dressage, 8 years experience with Icelandics
- Merrimack Valley Icelandics' assistant trainer and instructor under Ebba Meehan
- Specializes in training green horses and running drill team. Under her coaching, the MVI drill team has shown at Topsfield Fair and Equine Affaire for the last 3 years
- Showing dressage since 2010, eventing since 2012, and competing in Icelandic sport since 2017
- Rode regularly with USDF bronze and silver medalist Verne Batchelder and USDF gold medalist Brittany Powers Jamison for 10 years

# What is Dressage?

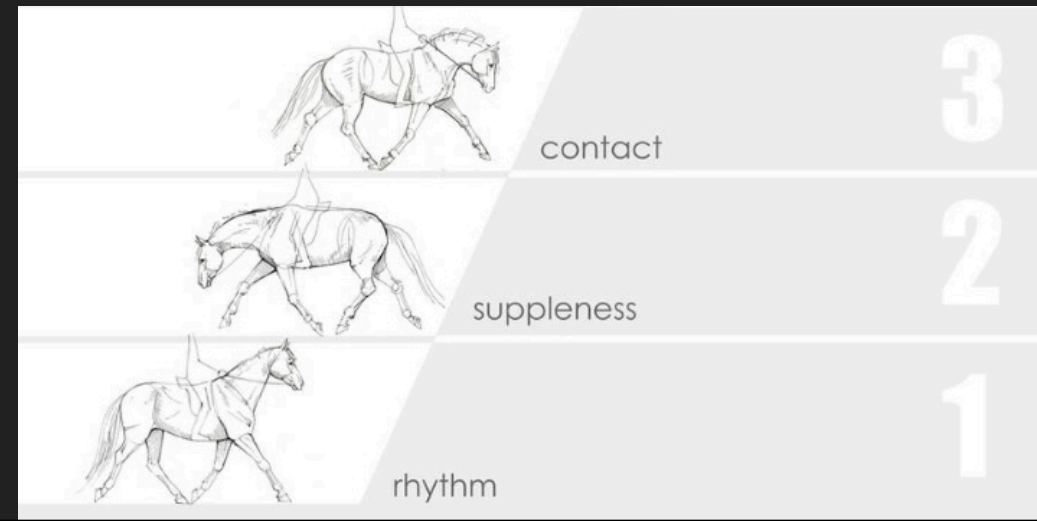
- Textbook definition: “Physical development through progressive conditioning, increasing thoroughness and obedience.”
- Translation: Developing the horse’s body slowly and correctly to become strong and flexible in order to carry a rider effortlessly. By doing so, we also create a horse that is capable of great athleticism under the direction of the rider while maintaining adjustability, lightness, and willingness.
- A dressage horse is both physically and mentally ready to say “Yes I can!” at all times



# The Training Scale Explained: The Familiarization Phase (Introductory and Training Level Tests)

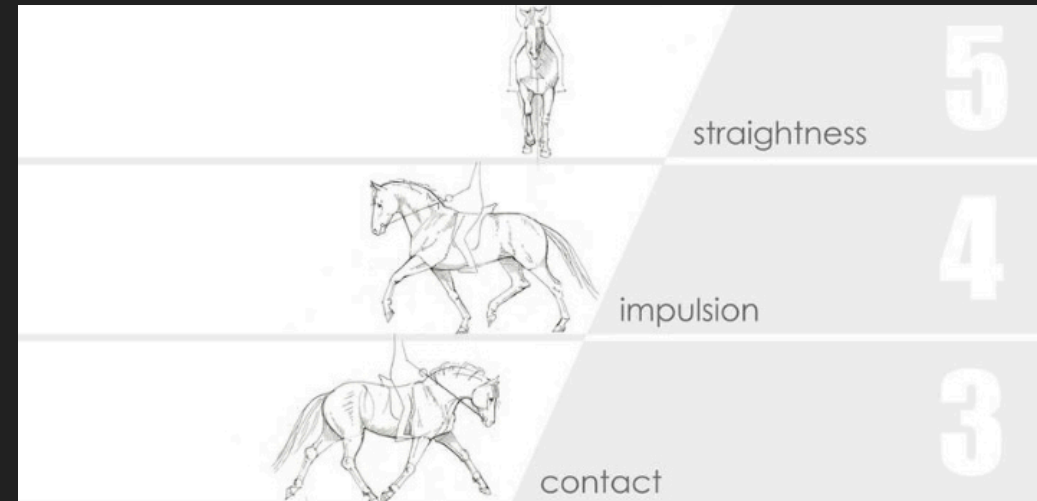
1. Rhythm – The pure sequence of footfalls and timing of any gait, expressed with energy, balance, and consistent tempo
2. Suppleness (or Relaxation) – The horse is mentally relaxed without anxiety or nervousness and is physically elastic, lacking negative muscle tension
3. Contact (or Connection) – The energy generated in the hindquarters by the driving aids that flows through the horse and is received by the rider's hands into an elastic and adjustable contact, creating a fluent conversation between horse and rider

As your horse accepts the contact and starts to move from being on the forehand into using the hindquarters, you will transition into the Pushing Power Phase



# The Training Scale Explained: The Pushing Power Phase (1<sup>st</sup> Level and 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Tests)

4. Impulsion – The energetic yet controlled propulsive thrust generated from the hindquarters into the movement of the horse.
5. Straightness – The footfalls of the forehand and the hindquarters are aligned on both straight and curved lines



When you add impulsion and straightness to the the Pushing Power Phase, it develops into the Carrying Power Phase

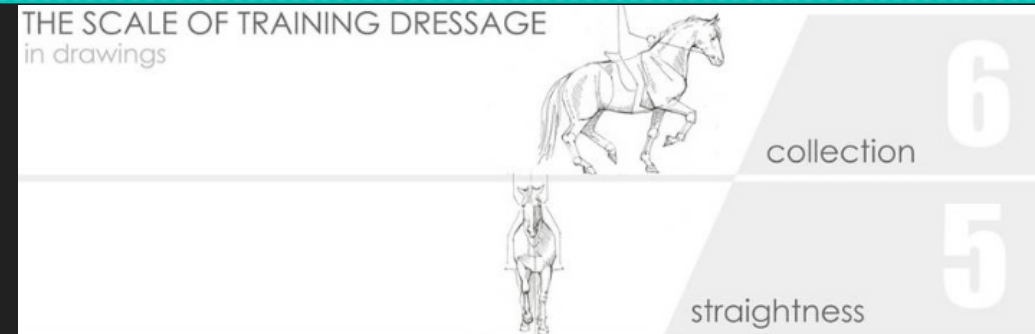
# The Training Scale Explained: The Carrying Power Phase (3<sup>rd</sup> Level to Grand Prix Level Tests)

6. Collection – The increased engagement of the hindquarters, promoting lightness of the forehand

Collection leads to Self Carriage

Self Carriage - The ultimate goal of dressage, where the horse carries itself while maintaining its own rhythm, stride, balance, and contact without assistance from the rider.

It is the pinnacle of horse and rider harmony!



# Why Dressage?



Go from this



To this

- Dressage - for every horse, every rider, from any discipline
- Proper muscular development
- Increased longevity and long term soundness
- Correctly carrying the burden while becoming the smallest burden possible
- By making the load easier to bear, we can move closer to the goal of harmonious riding

# Lateral Movement: Turn on the Forehand

Turn on the Forehand is when the horse moves its hindquarters around the forehand, crossing its hind legs under the body

## Why Turn on the Forehand?

- Isolate responses
- More mobile hindquarters

## When to Turn on the Forehand

- Resists leg pressure; leans
- Resists the restraining aids





# Lateral Movements: Leg Yield

Leg yielding is when the horse moves both forward and sideways equally, stepping under the body with the inside hind leg

## Why Leg Yield?

- Promotes stretching
- Creates elastic frame
- Better balance

## When to Leg Yield

- Resists leg pressure; leans
- Crooked; lacks straightness
- Misinterpretation of leg aid; forward response vs. sideways response



# Lateral Movements: Shoulder In

Shoulder In is when the horse bends around the rider's inside leg and moves the shoulders onto the inside while the hind stays on the outside, causing the horse's inside hind hoof to step on the same track as the outside front hoof.

## Why Shoulder In?

- Promotes even straightness
- Increased engagement of the hindquarters
- More mobile shoulders = more accurate directional control

## When to Shoulder In

- On the forehand
- Crooked
- Resists turning; prefers traveling straight



# Why Compete?

- Set Goals!
- Narrow your focus
- Exposure to new sights/sounds
- More confident horse
- Judge's feedback
- USDF All Breeds awards



- Too intense for you? Try a schooling show
- Not competitive? In dressage, you are not competing against others, only against your last test score
- Still uncomfortable competing? Try a Ride-Review-Ride. Half schooling show, half clinic ride

# Preparing Yourself and Your Horse for Competition



- Get those gaits clear! Both 4 and 5 gaited horses must have well separated gaits.
- Keep the contact! All gaits must be ridden with a steady connection.
- Equitation matters! A balanced, straight rider is a useful rider.
- Know your test and ride your figures accurately! Dressage tests are a series of figures ridden as precisely as possible.