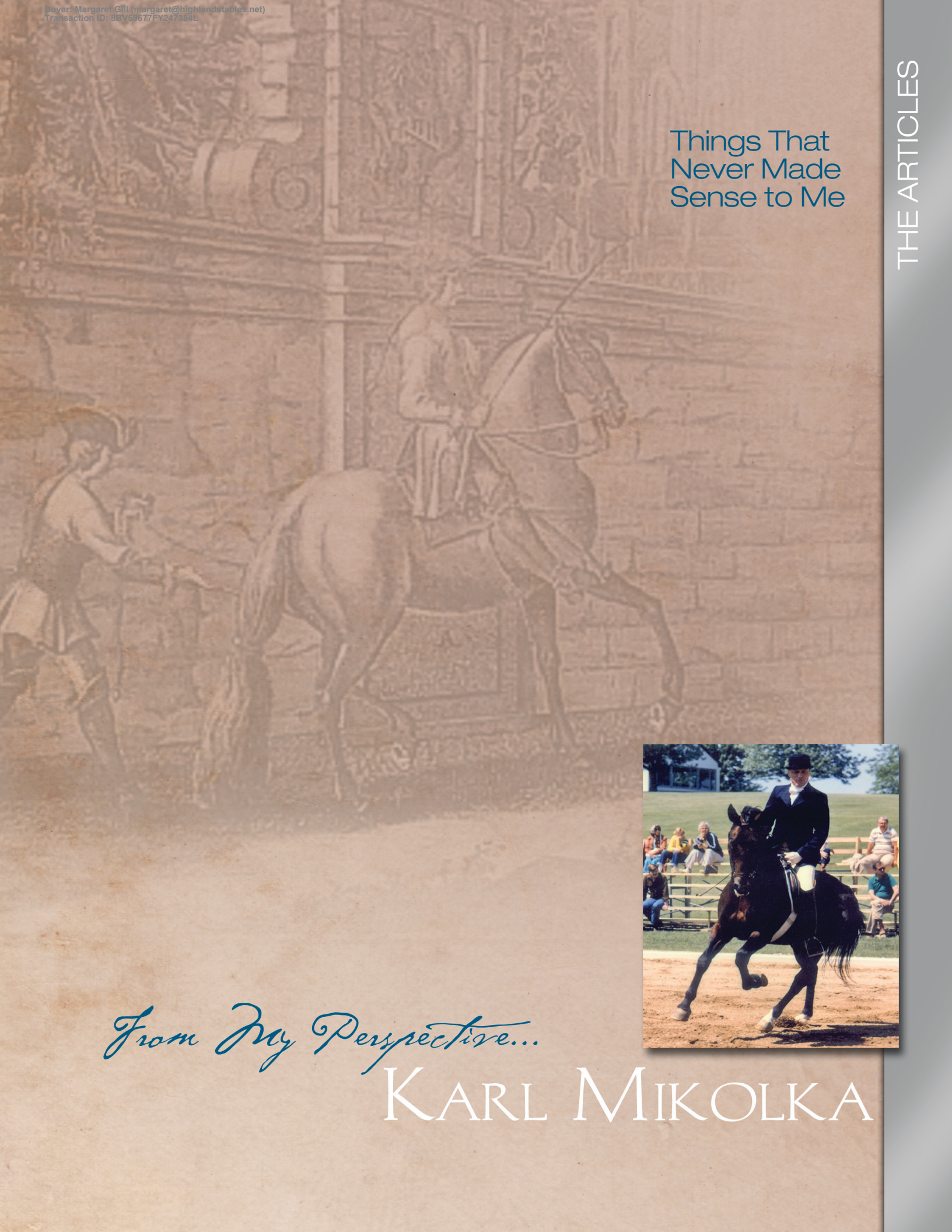


Things That
Never Made
Sense to Me



From My Perspective...

KARL MIKOLKA

Things That Never Made Sense to Me

THE ARTICLES

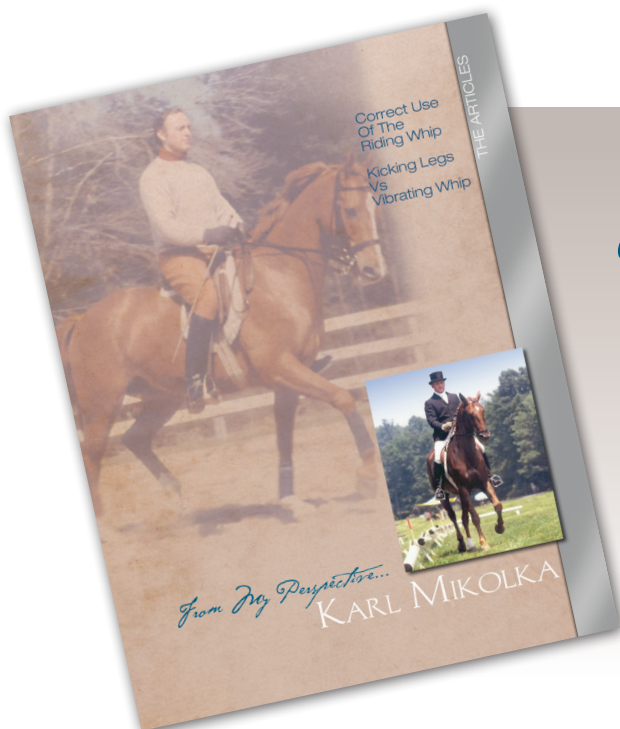
I've always wondered — not without certain dismay — why more riders than I care to number insist on producing a flying change on a young horse that is still struggling to find its balance. To make matters worse, these riders pursue the changes by throwing their bodies vehemently sideways, further forcing the horse off balance.

Most of the time, the horses protect themselves from falling down by changing only in front or in the rear and rarely changing with front and hind legs together.

This method is certainly contrary to my own experiences in dressage as a discipline that does not achieve movements by *unbalancing* the horse, but rather through a training process that creates movements through *improved* balance.



WADSWORTH, IL, 1983
Pluto Bonita during a young stallion performance at Tempel Farms.



The widespread insistence is that 'more leg' or a stronger leg pressure is the remedy for a lazy horse. Consider the evidence to the contrary: More leg will create more laziness; a strong leg will result in less sensitivity. How then can the rider be effective?

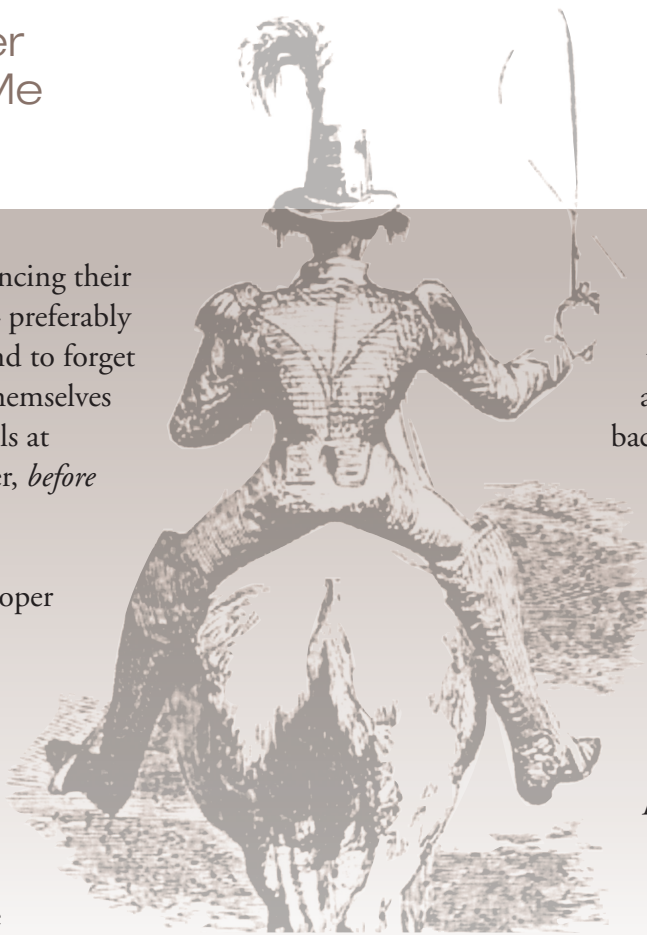
Visit www.karlmikolkadressage.com and learn the secrets of teaching your horse to move forward on his own with joy in my article, "The Correct Use of the Riding Whip".

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Riders who talk about advancing their horses through the levels — preferably up to Grand Prix — but tend to forget one major *detail*: to bring themselves up by honing their own skills at the same time or, even better, *before* attempting this goal.

It all starts with applying proper aids. It would seem that novice riders will be less coordinated in aiding their horses than a FEI level rider. A critical requirement when riding at a higher level is, among other things, the use of *invisible aids*.



If one can see kicking legs and poking spurs to keep the horse going, and legs flying forward and backward when doing flying changes, hands jumping up and down, and seats moving from one side to the other, then there is strong evidence that the rider himself has not yet mastered the basics. He has yet to transition from *primitive aiding* to *refined aiding* to *invisible aiding*.



I've always been puzzled that riders stuck at a low level in the saddle can even think of bringing their horses up to higher levels before improving their own rider skills.

It seems to me that nowadays, everything goes, is OK, accepted and tolerated. True horsemen, however, will not drop their standards nor let their principles be influenced by *trends* or less than perfect performances rewarded with high marks. The true rider does not ride for ribbons or scores, but rather for the well-being of the horse and the preservation of the values that make riding so special.

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I have difficulties understanding the popular negative attitudes towards High School Riding verbalized in condescending terms such as “*outdated, time consuming, old fashioned and no longer necessary*”.



Statements like those are a dead giveaway to lack of understanding of what the training of a horse, especially for dressage, is all about.

The School Horse is the master — or is supposed to be the master — of all movements, all exercises and all arena patterns. It knows how to perform them with **utmost precision**.

The old Riding Academies of Europe were the only places where such levels of perfection could be produced and

be maintained throughout a horse's life time. There was no stress, no rush and no obligation to bring a horse to the highest possible level in the shortest possible time.



LAINZ, AUSTRIA, 1937
Chief Rider Alfred Cebra riding
a Spanish Riding School stallion
in piaffe.

Competition horses and riders are under constant time pressures which in turn create the most serious obstacle for the training process. This should not be used as an excuse to condemn the time consuming education of the school master whose purpose of being was to teach young riders the correct feel for balance, suppleness, submissiveness, forward, relaxation and all the movements of the high school, including piaffe, passage, pirouettes and flying changes.

I consider myself privileged to have had the opportunity to sit on such horses during my time in the Spanish Riding School. Horses trained by Alfred Cerha, Gottlieb Polak, Josef Riedler, Hans Irbinger and Franz Meiringer were masterpieces of equestrian education.

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*Y*e recently celebrated the 2010 World Equestrian Games in Kentucky with a few outstanding performances along with numerous questionable ones. I am not here to criticize; I only want to point out that, in my opinion, dressage as a sport seems to be more concerned with pleasing the crowds than supporting a timeless guidance for the training of the horse.

Not everyone will be blessed with an opportunity to ride or own a horse like *Moorland Totilas*. Instead, most riders will have to deal with less gifted stock. To improve the common horse and elevate it to levels beyond its inborn abilities, it needs to be trained. The committed trainer, who brings each horse to its *personal best* level with the certainty that **all** basics are understood thoroughly by the equine student, will be rewarded with the greatest personal satisfaction.

While the Schoolmaster is the expert in all movements, exercises and arena patterns, the competition horse should at least be a master of the basics.

“High School Dressage is for all other branches of riding (steeplechase, jumping, military, etc.) what grammar is for a language.” - BURCHARD VON OETTINGEN, 1885

A competition horse should have some knowledge of basic grammar. Riding through movements which lack relaxation, balance, straightness, engagement, suppleness and proper head carriage were considered in my *“outdated, time consuming, old fashioned”* days, blatant *distorted images of the art of riding*.

I have made a serious commitment to the betterment of Dressage through the educational publications offered in this website, and encourage serious riders to pursue the subject in greater depth. *km*



No matter the discipline nor the breed, dressage training will benefit all.

