

THE CONTACT

MARCH 2023

www.nebraskadressage.org



50 YEARS

1973-2023



Making Contact

By Margo Hamilton

Things just breeze by me. I don't even think about them. I'm very often fully occupied thinking of other things. Occasionally though, after enough times glazing over something its meaning finally strikes me. For decades now I've read "The Contact" and then one day, longer into my tenure reading "The Contact" than I am willing to admit publicly, the larger meaning of the name of our newsletter struck me. And because I'm a dense object, it struck me quite hard.

Contact. Brilliant. Who named it? I don't know but they were a damn genius (and likely inspired by USDF Connection magazine). What an amazing name for a local dressage publication that keeps all of us, the membership connected and communicating. Much like, you know THE CONTACT we work for in our riding. That lovely elastic, free flowing understanding connection we make from the bend of our elbow to the ring of the bit. Always trying our very hardest as riders to be clear, precise and succinct.

Making that connection is absolutely fundamental to our riding. Connection is as fundamental to

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

success in dressage as balance and rhythm. USDF defines contact thusly:

The reins are stretched so that they form a straight line, not a loop. "Correct contact" or "acceptance of contact" is determined by the elasticity of the connection between horse and rider.

Merriam-Webster has many definitions for contact, but the most fitting for this circumstance is:

An establishing of communication with someone or an observing or receiving of a significant signal from a person or object.

Contact. The thing that brings us, and keeps us together. A truly apt name for our little publication. The purpose of this newsletter is to keep us, the Membership of the Nebraska Dressage Association connected. Contact is as essential to our organization as it is to our riding. To foster growth, ideas and a sense of community amongst all of us, despite the fact that we are stretched across the state. Contact between individual members, not

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Margo Hamilton



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Melissa Ward

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simply the board or the publication reaching out.

NDA is now in its 50th year. In our Golden Year of celebration we have to reflect upon what it means to run an organization of people. In a modern era where, even if you don't have a barn full of dressage riders to hang out with every week you can still be a part of a virtual community. Why bother with a Newsletter when there is TikTok and IG? Why bother with organizing educational and community events when there is YouTube? Well, because it matters. After 50 years, being able to speak face to face with another dressage enthusiast or another parent of a dressage enthusiast still matters. There is no replacement for the social ties that come with real life interaction.

I reflect now upon the benefits of my membership with NDA over the years; it's not that my name or my horses' names appear on trophies. Nor that I have great big ribbons gathering dust in my basement. No, it's not the glory, but the actual membership in an organization of people with whom I share a passion. A love. And after decades as a member of this one organization I not only have a strong connection to my dressage community but to other people, personally.

When people ask me what is the biggest benefit of becoming a member of NDA I tell them, "membership." It's a simple answer but with broad implications for your life. As a member of NDA when I was a junior I was able to hang out with other horse kids who were like me. We didn't always talk about horses, sometimes we discussed school, family, music and movies. I made horse friends and my social structure grew. I had more confidence, because in NDA I wasn't the weird horse girl. As a young adult amateur rider I met more friends. We could have hopefully quiet sidebar conversations at clinics and horse shows. Again, not just about horses but about work, grad school options, relationships. Volunteering at events gave me something to do with my time. My friends and I would go have dinner, have some drinks, catch a movie. I had social contacts and things to do outside of my career. I wasn't just the lady with horse pictures in her cubicle. Now as a mother and a barn owner and member of NDA I have connections to other women who have raised their children in barns. I have people in my life who understand my struggle. I don't feel like a total weirdo because I know there are other women out there just like me. And I can see those women and their perfectly normal, well-adjusted barn babies at NDA events.

In short, the social ties, and connections I have made over the years as part of this community

are of more value than a glossy pin or discounts on rental cars.

50 years in, NDA is still relevant because its membership continually gives back to its membership. We are the benefit and the benefactors of this organization. The average American spends \$1,200.00 a year on fast food. For a tiny fraction of that cost you can join NDA. Although Arby's may have "the meats," it's highly unlikely anyone working that drive through will be able to help you figure out how to find a saddle that will fit your short backed, pudgy, cranky mare. But the membership of NDA can (Her name is Ann, she's terrific). A membership with NDA is a small fee to pay to have an entire group of people available to you who can help you with your dreams. People who will actually marvel at your new saddle pad and matching boots. Unlike your husband!

For the entry into our community, one that has stood the tests of time, membership is worth the price.

Your people—your lunatic, horse-obsessed people who spend every free moment and available dime on an esoteric European horse sport (and its younger sister, with the saddle horns)—are here, in NDA. And you can meet them while you are volunteering at a horse show or event. Psychology has proven that volunteerism, giving back to a community boosts happiness. Volunteering gives people meaning in their lives. So now, as a member you're meeting new friends! As an active member you are giving back and feeling good.

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Your people...
are here, in NDA.

Shared interests bring people together. People who are of different income brackets, faiths, belief systems all with one love: dressage. From that shared love members become friends in some cases for life. Volunteer organizations are an essential, important part of what keeps a society functioning well, and thriving. It is easy for us to get farther apart. We have been separated by a pandemic, rendered insecure by technology trying to replace contact with distraction, divided by political rhetoric that makes us wary of each other, stressed out by an economy that makes dreams seem out of reach. Well...I'm not saying NDA is gonna save the country but connecting with people, remembering you have things in common with people...well...it's not gonna hurt. ❖

The International Event of the Year!

The Longines

FEI WORLD CUP of Dressage, Vaulting and Jumping

returns to the CHI Health Center
in Omaha April 4-8.



No ticket? No problem.

While the Jumping, Vaulting and Dressage competitions are ticketed events inside the arena there is plenty of action happening inside the trade fair area adjacent to the show ring. You DO NOT have to have a ticket to enter the CHI Health Center. While inside the trade fair area you will be bombarded by the world's best vendors. Countless educational booths, food and entertainment, demonstrations and opportunities for autographs.

Most importantly, the warm-up arena is located inside the trade fair area. You can watch all of your favorite riders warm-up your favorite horses from all across the world for free. That's right! You can stand ring side and watch the world's top riders share the same warm-up ring right here in Nebraska. Even if you have tickets, watching warm-up is a magical experience not to be missed. So make a plan, bring a friend and get ready to welcome the best of the best to our wonderful state!





Are You Planning to Show This Year?

If so, this is your March reminder to **get your horse registered with NDA now!**

In order to qualify for NDA awards BOTH horse and rider need to be members of NDA.

Not sure if your horse is registered? Reach out to the Membership Committee and they can confirm for you.



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SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

OR

Persistence Pays Off

By Karin Nilsson

My sweet horse, Leo, and I were looking forward to participating in the Olivia LaGoy-Weltz clinic at Serenity Rose Equestrian Center at the end of September. Leo and I had just participated in Regionals and had a great time. Leo marched into the crowded warmups like the seasoned “old guy” that he is and led the way for us to put in a very respectable 3-3 test. We had the best time!

Soooooo.....I was really looking forward to riding and learning in this clinic. The day started out very cold and windy. As Leo and I had spent several years stabling at the clinic facility, I didn't even give a thought to his behavior. He's always my steady Eddie! I hopped on, warmed up inside and headed outside.

As we reached the ring, the wind picked up, the banners flapped, and the new, very beautiful gazebo wasn't there the last time we were in the ring. My sweet trainer grabbed the bridle and stuffed us into the ring. We walked on tiptoes for a round and a half, the wind picked up and whistled through the sound system and steady Leo became crazy Leo. I, unfortunately, didn't react in a way to help him at all. I could only think, “Who stole my horse and replaced him with this shaking, spooking nut!”

We found that the end of the arena was a fairly safe place to try and get work done. Olivia was very sympathetic and helped us work through our

issues using shoulder-in to renvers to shoulder-in, all on a 20 meter circle. With her quiet guidance we both took a breath and were able to focus on trying to listen and learn. Canter was next and Olivia guided us through spiraling in and out and transitions from walk to canter, always keeping his very shaky focus on me.

We survived. Gracia led us from the ring with me muttering, “This wasn't fun. I'm not sure if I'm coming tomorrow.” Well, that didn't play well with Gracia. She looked me in the eye and said, “You need to be his leader and this is how you will do it.” We talked and practiced and I promised to try my best the next day.

Sunday dawned sunny and much warmer. My resolve was strong and Leo's soft eye had returned. We entered the arena with a much calmer attitude and proceeded to work and learn. We focused on correct and straight walk to canter transitions to help us with our changes. Spiraling in to a pirouette canter was a new experience for me but Leo said no problem. This exercise helped us create the canter for clean changes. Olivia also had us perform turn on the haunches to a prompt canter transition, also helping with a correct canter. We finished feeling very proud of ourselves and looking forward to our next adventure. Leo and I thank Nebraska Dressage Association for their support. ❖



Sharon Packer @ Horse Sports Photography

Alison Sader Larson Comes Back to the Good Life

By Margo Hamilton

In 1974 a little, blonde, 6-year-old girl named Alison began riding horses. What she could not know at such a young age is how far horses would take her. What gifts, accomplishments and purpose these horses would bestow upon her. And that she herself would go on to have a powerful impact on the horse world. In 1978 that young lady got more serious. She joined Cornhusker Pony club at a stable then known as “Boomer’s” (now Middle Cross Stables). Under the watchful eye of Lowell Boomer himself (founder of the United States Dressage Federation and The Dressage Foundation), she developed into a bold young rider competing over fences and at Pony Club rallies before deciding to specialize exclusively in dressage.

Riding has taken Alison Sader Larson all over the globe. In 2022 she and her husband Dr. Ken Larson moved back to “The Good Life” once more, to be nearer to family and to pursue new opportunities. Alison is now “¾” retired, but remains connected to the sport through her coaching and lesson programs. With her return

to Nebraska and in Nebraska Dressage’s 50th Anniversary, it is a fitting time to reflect upon her amazing career in the sport of Dressage. Her list of awards, invitations, and accomplishments could easily double as a modern history of dressage in the United States.

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People forget, or they don’t know. They think dressage came out of New York or California with big money, but it didn’t. It started here in Nebraska.

In 1985 Alison Sader was the first Nebraskan to compete at The North American Continental Young Riders Championships (Now known as the FEI North American Youth Championships). She was a luminary in the early years of NDA, inspiring a generation of riders to pursue competitions at higher levels and a larger scale. Larson was one of the first midwestern riders to begin competing

in the Florida circuit during its infancy. While attaining her Bachelors degree in Sociology and Psychology from Doane University she kept and trained her own horses on her family’s property which is also the home to Wilderness Kennels. Her brother continues to manage and operate Wilderness Kennels.

“I began riding at Boomer’s place. We had limited resources and so I rode a lot on my own. I watched videos. Later I was a working student under Tom Poulin and then Lendon Grey and I really started to develop my skills. As a working student, I worked for my education. I learned a lot.”

In the early years of her riding career Larson had the opportunity to learn from the best in the world. She credits Cindy Ishoy (Canadian Olympian), Lendon Grey (US Olympian, founder of Dressage for Kids), Michelle Gibson (US Olympian), Willie Schulties (German Olympic Team Trainer), Klaus Balkenhol (US Team Coach) Hubertus Schmidt and Robert Dover (US



business, training students as well as managing a Hanoverian breeding program. In 2000 Ken was accepted to a Veterinary Program at the University of Minnesota, so their business moved once more, this time to the twin cities. In Minnesota Larson established a solid training business, working with Eventers as well as dressage riders. "I really enjoy working with Eventers. They are always very excited to learn something new. Every training tip seems like magic!" says Larson of working with a varied clientele.

began working with a man already employed by the farm. He was the man who put first rides on the young horses. In 2014, Michael Suchanek began what can be modestly called a meteoric rise in dressage. Suchanek, having learned his skills from Larson, has gone on to dominate the USEF Young horse program with horses bred by Leatherdale Farm's stallions, winning multiple championships at The Festival of Champions and USDF Nationals. In 2021, Suchanek earned his USDF Gold medal and is a rider to watch. Larson has also had great success with Young Riders competing at the top levels. Most recently her student Bianca Schmidt has been a member of the USDF Region 4 Young Rider team. Schmidt has also been selected as a member of the USEF Emerging Athlete Program.

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Olympian, US Dressage Coach) for a dressage education founded upon the basic principles of dressage. "My teaching, my riding is based on 'the scale.' I'm surprised to find riders, even advanced riders, who cannot recite the training scale by heart. It's at the core of everything!"

By 1987 Larson had already earned her USDF Bronze Medal. Her Silver would follow in 1989. Larson was invited in 1991 and competed in the Olympic Festival as one of the top 16 riders in the country. She earned her USDF Gold medal in 1994. At the time, Larson was one of the youngest riders, at age 24, to have earned all three of her USDF medals.

Along the way as they spent time together at Boomer's, riding and competing on the same Young Rider's team and traveling to shows, she met and grew to love the man who would become her husband: Dr. Ken Larson. Born in Omaha but raised in Kearney, Ken shared a passion for warmbloods and dressage. In October of this year, Alison and Ken will celebrate 25 years of marriage. Although Dr. Larson no longer rides, he still maintains a good eye and can be helpful with his perspective on horses or riders when called upon for an opinion.

In the summer of 1994 the Larsons moved to Michigan to begin a training business. They remained at this

Along her riding journey, Larson was invited to participate in numerous high performance clinics. In 2008 she campaigned her horse Legretto in the Olympic Games Selection classes held in Wellington, FL and was invited to participate in USEF High Performance training sessions with Debbie McDonald. "I'm really proud to have been a part of the development of the scene in Wellington for the last 22 years. It's the best competition in the country," says Larson of the extensive time she has spent training, competing and coaching in Wellington. Over the course of her career Larson has been selected several times for Olympic Selection Competitions.

Larson graduated the USDF "L" judges program with distinction in 2011. In 2015 she was accepted into the USDF "r" judges training program. At the time however she opted to focus her efforts on riding and coaching. The only aspect of Larson's career more impressive than her own riding career is the success of her students. She has helped scores of her students earn their own USDF bronze, silver and gold medals. Not to mention USDF Regional Championship titles, USDF Finals titles, USEF Festival of Champions titles and places on the FEI Young Rider podium. She is understandably proud of the hard work and excellent riding demonstrated by her students.

While in Minnesota, Larson began working as a trainer at Leatherdale Farms. It was there Larson

Over the course of her 30-year career in dressage, many things have changed. Larson reflects upon the development of the sport positively. "The quality of everything has changed. The quality of the footing. The quality of the veterinary care for performance horses has changed and developed for the better. There is more training available and the quality of the horses has changed a lot. For the better."

At this stage in her career, Larson no longer rides. Having bred, broke and trained her own horses to the top of the sport, she is ready to explore the new challenges and experiences life has to offer. Larson ceased riding when her husband entered into Medical School to pursue another Medical degree, this time for humans. Now "Dr. Dr. Ken Larson" is a practicing radiologist in Omaha. She enjoys spending time with her family in Lincoln. Larson is an avid baker, and enjoys hunting with her husband and their two labrador retrievers. Although she is ¾ retired, Larson stays connected to the dressage scene here and in Florida. As she continues to coach top riders she is driven to remain up on current trends in breeding and training.

"Good Life Dressage" is accepting a very limited number of new students. Those interested in her services should inquire via her Facebook page for more information about her availability. ❖



2023 Calendar Sponsors

Thanks to our sponsors for contributing to the 2023 NDA Calendar!

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- Coda Cavallo Riding Academy**
- Shan Lawton Dressage**



Prepare Yourself for the Tests

By Margo Hamilton

Beginning December 1, 2022, USDF rolled out new tests for USDF Introductory Level to Fourth Level, Musical Freestyle and USDF Developing Horse tests. USDF develops new tests every 4 years. Changes to tests most often are made to vary up the sport or to emphasize parts of dressage training the designers of these tests would like to see more or less in our national riding program. Tests may be downloaded for free at www.usdf.org or be found on the USDF Test Pro app.

Be sure you are memorizing the 2023 tests!!! Double check the top of the sheet or screen to make sure you have the correct year.

Western Dressage Association of America tests also change every 4 years. Western Dressage riders will continue to use WDAA tests from 2022 this year. These tests can be downloaded at www.westerndressageassociation.org.

New tests of course mean it is time to LEARN the new tests. There has never been a better time to learn these new dressage tests than RIGHT NOW. In order to put your horse's best hoof forward in the sandbox, you must first know where you are going! Many are guilty of trying to "cram" for their dressage tests in the horse trailer outside of the show 2 hours before they warm-up! Riders are allowed to have a reader for their tests, alas, it is best practice to know your test before entering the show ring.

If this is your first year showing in a dressage arena, make yourself familiar with the lay of the land. Knowing the length and width of a standard (20m x 60m) and short (20m x 40m) is essential. The dimensions of the arena help you understand how large or small your figure will be within the space given. In other words, knowing

the dimensions of the arena will help you ride more accurately. Before you can begin to learn the movements of a test, be certain you know where all the letters are located in the arena. Including the invisible letters of the centerline. Many riders coming down the centerline for a final salute develop a befuddled look when deciding where "G" is located.

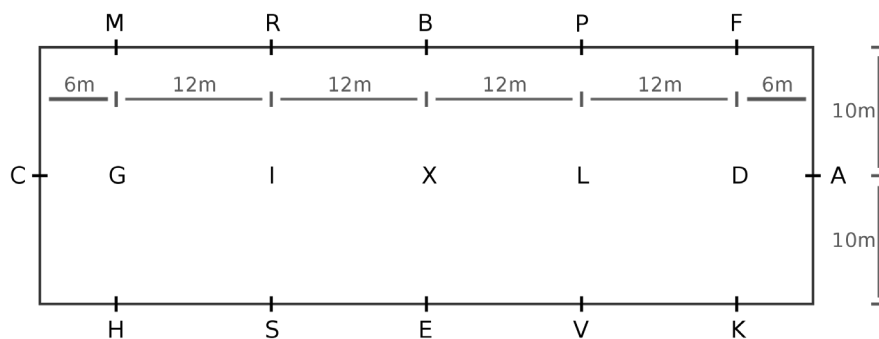
Every step of a dressage test is judged. While you are memorizing from which letter your leg yield right begins, it is essential to think about how you will ride your centerline and prepare your horse for the movement to come. Judges are on the lookout for well ridden, harmonious tests. For example, think about how to ride a short side of the arena. It has two corners and a straight line and is not a 20m half circle. This type of thinking will impact your overall score positively. Reading the "Directives" section of the tests will illuminate more fully what judges are looking for in each movement of each test.

Step one of learning the new tests for every rider is simply to read them. For some people, reading these tests repeatedly will suffice. Reading them out loud is very helpful, especially if you

plan on being a reader. Drawing out an arena or purchasing a dressage arena whiteboard is an excellent strategy for visual learners. Putting pen to paper or marker to white board adds a physical component to the intellectual learning portion of test memorization. So, by using your body and your mind at the same time to learn you are doubling your chances of retaining the information you need to know!

Using the USDF Test Pro app on a phone or tablet riders can read the tests, hear them read and see the movements drawn out as the test is read on the app in an arena. For people more accustomed to learning on and with screens this is an easy way to study the tests in an easily accessible form.

The best way to learn dressage tests, for both horse and rider, is to practice the movements from the tests at home before the show. Break these new tests into various movements. For example, working the trot circle into the canter work in Training level is an excellent way to become familiar with what you will be judged on later. Once you are familiar with the trot work, practice canter and walk. Then ride the whole



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test from start to finish. Remembering of course to salute at the beginning and end with your right hand.

Riding buddies can be really helpful in this process. While you are first learning to ride your test all the way through, have a friend read for you while you ride and then switch places. Now two people are learning the new tests and you are both becoming skilled readers. As a reader you want to begin reading the next movement to come in a test when the rider is about half way through the movement they are currently doing. For example, if your friend is riding a free walk on the long rein KXM and will have to shorten up and trot at C, the reader should inform the rider of the trot transition after the rider passes X on the diagonal.

Readers are allowed in both Schooling and USDF rated shows, EXCEPT in Championship classes. Riders do not receive bonus points or higher scores if they ride tests from memory. Although, if your reader messes up and forgets a movement or reads the wrong test (say the 2019 test) and you follow the reader's direction your score will suffer greatly. Even those planning to ride with readers should know, before they ride, exactly where they are to go in the ring for each ride. Readers are only allowed to read movements one time, and exactly as written, additional directions or elaborations from the written test is considered unauthorized assistance.

The consequences of not knowing your tests are terrible for your overall score. Going off course in a test is a costly mistake and is jarring to the flow of your ride and concentration. You'll know you have gone off course when you hear the judge ring a bell or blow a whistle. If this happens immediately stop your horse and wait for directions. The judge will tell you you've lost your way and send you back to the place he or she would like you to start again. Two points are deducted from your score for the first error of course. Four points are deducted for the second error of course. If you should go off course three times you will be eliminated.

Best of luck to all those competing this year. Start learning your tests now. You've spent a great deal of time learning to ride beautifully, don't let yourself or your horse down by not knowing exactly where all that beauty is supposed to go! ❖

Youth Lessons

Dressage is a sport loved by people of all ages. Junior and Young Riders are the future of equestrian sports. They inspire riders in all divisions with their acumen and dedication to this classical art. Like any beautiful art form, Dressage has a specialized vocabulary. Words and concepts riders have to bring to life. So we've consulted with Junior riders to find out exactly how well they know their stuff in a feature we're calling "Youth Lessons."

Every term has its own official definition as well as a functional component—or more clearly: each term has a "what, why, and how" part. Anyone can look those definitions up on USDF.org but it may not be as helpful as a more practical, applied definition can be. So because every rider has something to teach and something to learn, let us learn from our juniors. They are dedicated and passionate, and may just hold some wisdom for all of us.

How does this work? Randomly selected Junior riders in the area were asked one simple question. But beforehand, they were told not to Google the answer or worry too much about what they believed a dictionary definition would be. Definitions could be made using regular riding words. Could be how something is done, or when, or why. Just tell us about our word.

Our first Youth Lesson question is:

"WHAT IS A HALF-HALT?"



Joslyn Schomaker (14)
Lincoln, Nebraska

"A half-halt is the most important thing in dressage. It puts a horse in collection. It helps to control the horse. To bring your horse up to work. If you don't do your half-halts the horse is just going to run around and be kind of out of control. The half-halt also helps them to use their hind end, use their whole body."

Jos rides a 17-yr-old mare

"Say you are going at a trot speed, but want to slow down to a walk. One would do a half-halt to prepare them for what's next. Always give lots of rewards for the horse, when they get what you are saying, even a little bit."

Claire rides a 7-yr-old mare



Claire Mathis (14)
Lincoln, Nebraska

Thank you so much to Claire and Josyln for being such good sports! It will be fun to hear what our youth riders have to say about other dressage terms. There are plenty of terms to learn that's for sure (some of them are even in English)!