

DRESSAGE TODAY

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# EXTRA

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*Monica  
Theodorescu*

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FROM THE DRESSAGE TODAY ARCHIVES



# 18 Tips from German Olympian **MONICA THEODORESCU**

Inside a session from The Old Masters Series at Avalon Farm in North Salem, New York.

Jannike Gray and Ravanti C

*By Beth Baumert*



**G**erman Olympian and coach of the German Equestrian Team Monica Theodorescu worked with eight horse-and-rider pairs at The Old Masters Series hosted at Anke Ott Young's Avalon Farm in North Salem, New York in September 2017. An accomplished equestrian, Monica follows in the footsteps of her late parents—dressage master Georg Thoerodescu and his wife, Inge, who rode for Germany as a show jumper—and was an obvious choice for Frank R. Henning who developed The Old Masters Series with the goal of preserving the traditions and values of the old dressage Masters. More than 600,000 auditors have attended these events since their inception.

Henning addressed the group at the beginning of the clinic and conveyed the mission of his Old Masters Series: that the masters might share their wealth of knowledge gained through their lengthy riding and training careers. He said, "A good rider gets on his horse and says, 'What can I do better?'" That was the theme of the event—how we, as riders, can be patient and clear and trusting of the system of

training that is reflected in the Training Scale.

This event was free to auditors, and proceeds gathered from the silent auction, a Bates saddlery raffle and other donations went to benefit the Norma Pfriem Breast Care Center. Here are 18 tips taken from Monica's training sessions:

**1** Give your horse enough time to be comfortable in his new surroundings.

Monica praised the first rider for walking her mare in hand and then walking under saddle until the horse was relaxed, confident, attentive and able to do quality work. A later horse in the program was nervous and lacking confidence in the warm up. "Take it easy," she said. "We have all day. Always remember that your horse



**German Olympian and coach of the German Equestrian Team Monica Theodorescu**

**Lisa Postleb Kaptein and Bretton Beauty, a 4-year-old Hanoverian gelding**





must be loose and relaxed before we can go on."

**2** Always start with the easier direction to make it comfortable for your horse.

**3** Ride with passive hands and work the horse from behind. One young mare challenged the contact with little pulls forward and downward, and she sometimes appeared to lean on the bit. Monica encouraged the rider to keep the frame with her reins. "Don't stretch out your arms," she said. "Keep your elbows on your body. She has to stay to the contact. Halt halts prevent her from leaning."

To another rider on a big, slightly unbalanced horse, she said, "Give him a contact, but try not to pull him down [into a rounder frame] with your hands.

If you argue with your hands, you don't allow the hind legs to come forward. When your horse pushes well from behind, he gets rounder by himself and you don't have to pull him down."

**4** Improve the contact with a little flexion and bend. "Don't just flex with the hand. He must accept the inside leg too or your horse will just tilt. When you successfully get inner bend from your inside leg, your horse uses his inside hind leg better. Then the contact will be good as he works from behind and relaxes his back," she said. "Push his belly to the outside, and you will see his mouth gets more relaxed."

**5** Ride forward but don't run. Your horse must be active but also relaxed. "Push to help your



Lara Ceppi

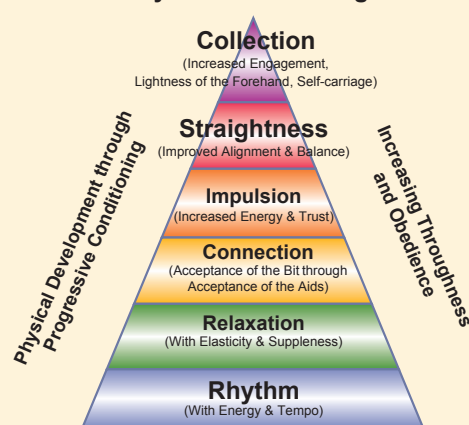
**Cara Klothe and Dhanube, a 4-year-old German Oldenburg Verband mare**

## Q&A with Monica Theodorescu

**Q** Over the years, horses have changed because of better breeding. Has your management or your training changed as a result?

**A** No. It's true that we have lighter and more uphill horses than in the past, but a horse is still a horse. It has four legs, a head and a tail. There is only one way—what we call the correct way. Mr. Stecken says, "There is only correct riding. That's enough." This works for all the horses. Our Training Scale leaves enough room for differences: That is, some horses need to be rounder or more forward or slower. Some need more or less frequent transitions, but the Training Scale is still the way for all horses.

### Pyramid of Training



**Q** One horse had mouth issues, and the rider asked what she should change when showing.

**A** Nothing. Just keep riding. That's just how your horse shows his stress. The more you worry about it, the more your horse will feel it, and it will add to his stress.



horse achieve more over-track without getting faster," she said.

At the same time, the upper neck got rounder.

**6** Ride quality transitions. "Don't do transitions any which way," she said. "Do good transitions with correct aids. Your horse has to listen to you and do it well because later when you do flying changes, you will need those same half halts, and you will need your horse to be in front of the leg. He can't do it on his own."

**7** Put your horse in front of the leg. "You can't do half halts or movements—or anything—if your horse isn't in front of you. To that end, don't push all the time or give too many leg or spur aids. If you use the leg all the time, the horse thinks, does she mean it or not? I don't know. It doesn't matter. Instead give a little impulse with your leg and then open your legs. Take your legs away and keep them long. When your horse is in front of you, you will see the muscles in front of the withers come up, he will breathe better and work very forward.

**8** Notice that when the work is good, the hocks become more flexible and, as a result, the croup goes down.

**9** "Listen. You can hear the relaxed rhythm and the rhythmic breath." Snorting is a good sign. "I always like it when a horse is snorting because it means he is relaxed and happy," she said.

**10** Give enough breaks. "Not only is it important physically," she said, "but it's also rewarding. Take enough time. Horses shouldn't be rushed."

**11** Use patience and repetition. "To make something better, we must repeat it instead of pulling and kicking and insisting in the moment."

**12** Ask your horse to stretch. When a horse stretches well, it shows that the work was good. "You

want to see that the tail swings," she said. "We want to see that the horse is active behind, and he reaches out in a relaxed, rhythmic way."

**13** Be Consequent. In other words, from precise correct aids, your horse should give you a precise, correct response. One horse had difficulty with transitions from medium to free walk and back to medium walk. Monica encouraged the rider to practice the transition several times. "Teach her to be obedient," she said. "Being consequent doesn't mean being tough. It means being clear. Don't discuss or argue the point. Instead, repeat it until your horse understands."

**14** Praise often. "When he's good, pat him. Tell him, 'Good boy!'"

**15** Prepare. For example, when you want to half pass from the centerline, volte first so you get the bend you need for the half pass. From the correct bend, you can frame the outside shoulder and the half pass is correct and easy.

**16** Every downward transition must be ridden forward with the leg. "The hind legs in every downward transition must come under," Monica said. "and your leg aids ask the hind leg to step under and carry more weight. Be consequent in all

## The Horse-and-Rider Pairs

**Cara Klothé and Dhanube**, a 4-year-old German Oldenburg Verband mare

**Lisa Postleb Kaptein and Bretton Beauty**, a 4-year-old Hanoverian gelding

**Jannike Gray and Ravanti C**, an 8-year-old mare by Rubenstein  
**Molly Maloney and Rembrandt**, a 7-year-old KWPN gelding by Rosseaux

**David Thind and Wibke**, a 13-year-old Warmblood mare


**David Collins and Bojing**, a 7-year-old Hanoverian gelding

**Heather Mason and Lincoln**, a 12-year-old Oldenburg gelding

**Elizabeth Caron and Schroeder**, a 13-year-old Hanoverian stallion owned by Kathy Hickerson

transitions: walk-canter-walk. Shorten the canter and see that your horse takes weight behind. If he doesn't, go forward and try again. Expect the same result with trot-halt-trot transitions, and in transitions from medium canter to collected canter. Be aware of this aspect of all downward transitions.

**17** When you want to collect, do it with your seat. Push the hind legs under in the downward transition so they are in a position to carry more weight. Then sit on the hind leg.

**18** Überstreichen—release both reins for several strides. "This will prove whether or not your horse is in self carriage." 

**Monica Theodorescu's** star-studded dressage career included three German team gold medals from Olympic Games—Seoul in 1988, Barcelona in 1992 and Atlanta in 1996; she won team gold and individual bronze medals at the Stockholm World Championships in 1990; and she won several gold, silver and bronze medals at European Champions. In addition, she won two World Cup titles. Today she serves as coach of the German dressage team.





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# Promoting Healthy Joints Through the Levels

*By Jessica Morgan, DVM*

**W**hen your horse's joints become stressed or diseased, you might hear your veterinarian talk about osteoarthritis (OA) or degenerative joint disease (DJD). Simply put, OA and DJD, in the natural progression of the disease process, are the degeneration of the cartilage and the synovial membrane, creating synovitis and bone remodeling. In the athletic horse, this degeneration of the cartilage is caused by reactive forces on the joint from the interac-

tion of the horse's conformation and the ground surface he is working on. It can also be caused by a traumatic wound incident involving the joint. But for our purposes, let's focus on keeping joints healthy in the long run. Horses of any age can be affected by this issue, but you should be considerate of weight management, shoeing intervals and genetic predisposition.

The biggest factor in how the athletic horse is going to handle stress placed on his joints relies on a detailed conditioning program and correct riding. I find that horses who are conditioned to work on many different types of ground surfaces seem to have less joint trouble. Single-surface horses tend to have fairly predictable and specific injuries.

Horses are meant to move around constantly, not just for an hour each day. The more a horse walks in a day, the better. It's the long, slow movements that will benefit your horse's soft tissue and joint structures. If you are not getting 9s and 10s in your walk work, this is your opportunity to think about what you can do to improve the walk and help condition your horse's joints, too. For example, when people see human physical therapists for injury, the work is slow, correct and deliberate. Your riding should be the same.

How does OA begin? Hard or deep footing, lack of traction, ligament strain, hyperextension or taking a bad step can all contribute to the inflammatory cascade that produces synovitis. Clinically, we may observe a range of signs, from reluctance to perform, joint filling or puffiness (joint effusion) to overt lameness.

Basic preventive action begins with intimately knowing all the bumps and blemishes on your horse's legs and noticing when one of them changes. For acute joint filling, icing is highly



Amy K. Dragoo

**Most cases of osteoarthritis can be diagnosed with a good static examination.**

effective in 20-minute cycles up to several times a day. Support-banding after icing coupled with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) will keep a small problem from turning into a more chronic problem. Early detection does matter.

You can spend a lot of money on radiographs, ultrasounds, MRIs or CT scans, but most cases of OA can be diagnosed with a good static examination. This includes a thorough history of what has transpired, palpation and motion examination that leads to diagnostic analgesia, or blocking the joint with a numbing agent to confirm that the joint is actually contributing to the lameness. As the saying goes, we don't ride radiographs. We ride horses who may have abnormalities on radiographs that do not cause issues. Joint blocks provide a high level of confidence in determining a specific diagnosis.

Unfortunately, there are no significant clinical signs that point to one joint. Any joint with dysfunction can cause similar clinical signs. If you are still wondering about a clicking sound within a joint, it comes from fluid movement/displacement within the joint and may not necessarily be a problem. Don't forget that joints in the vertebral column can undergo primary joint degeneration and cause significant pain. I typically rule out and treat all limb lameness, then investigate the neck, back and pelvis when dealing with multiple joints.

Medical treatments start with NSAIDs as needed, such as phenylbutasone, flunixin meglumine (Banamine) or firocoxib (Equioxx). All of these medications can cause ulcerations in the mouth, stomach or hindgut, and in my opinion, one is not better than the other. With your veterinarian as a guide, start with

the recommended amount then try to reduce to the smallest amount that makes a difference. You should be concerned if it takes long-term daily NSAIDs to allow your horse to do his job. Be sure to talk to your veterinarian.

Joint injection with various combinations of steroids and hyaluronic acid is an effective treatment for effusive and painful joints that have been proven to be causing an issue by utilizing joint blocks. Regenerative therapies like stem cells, PRP and IRAP can work, too. We don't know which treatment is best yet, but we are getting closer.


The main issue with supplements is that they are not controlled or regulated substances. A good way to know what you are getting is to use supplements that have been evaluated by the National Animal Supplement Council or a consumer lab. It's the closest thing to having FDA approval. They evaluate claims and make sure the product contains what it promotes. They provide integrity and consistency in a very confusing market. You should also know that cost does not equate to efficacy. Just because you spend more doesn't mean the supplement will do more.

Absorption of a supplement and its entry into the joint of the horse is the biggest question. There are a few ingredients we know that are absorbed orally and have been found to prevent and improve lameness using the racing Thoroughbred as a model. An oral glycosaminoglycan called hyaluronic acid is one of them. The studies on avocado's, soy's and omega 3's effect on inflammation are also very promising.

Intramuscular injectables, such as Adequan and Pentosan, are for cartilage repair and maintenance. The labeled dose is every four days for a series of injections. Many horses receive in-

jections in a much longer interval and, therefore, may not be getting the full benefit the owner believes they are providing. Legend is a mid-range molecular-weight hyaluronic acid. Truthfully, we are not sure how it really works as it does not have a long-term effect (2 to 4 days) but it is very effective when there is an acute synovitis. I tend to believe that if Legend is working, oral hyaluronic acid will work, too, and not require the injections.

A new trend is administering intravenous bisphosphonates, such as Tildren® or Osphos®. They are useful for bone edema or when osteoarthritis is advanced. They provide bone-pain relief by inhibiting osteoclasts. It can be a very effective treatment when used appropriately.

For the long haul, while you are moving through the levels with your horse, keep a detailed calendar of how your horse is doing, what his exercise level is and the response to different treatments that you have tried. The basic fundamentals of horsemanship and ice will go a long way in the prevention of osteoarthritis. 

**Jessica Morgan, DVM**, is an equine lameness diagnostics veterinarian at Morgan Equine Veterinary & Farrier Hospital in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. She and her husband, Dallas Morgan, CJF, are focused on equine lameness diagnostics, current lameness therapeutics and farriery for performance horses. They are amateur eventers who take their work in the dressage court very seriously. Jessica has a Westphalian mare who excels in the dressage phase and Dallas rides a Thoroughbred named Dave.



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