

# SPECIAL REPORT

## 3 SECRETS TO MAKING EVERY RIDE A GREAT RIDE Jane Savoie

### 1. Learn to see things in shades of grey.

Want to know how to have a great ride everyday? Stop expecting perfection. Don't look at training and competing in black or white terms. Instead, learn to see things in "shades of gray". The key to seeing shades of gray is to recognize when things are "a little bit better".

For example, when you evaluate your daily ride, ask yourself if:

Regarding your position:

1. Were your hands a little quieter?
2. Did you sit a bit straighter today?
3. Did you keep your eyes up for more of your ride than you did yesterday?
4. Were you able to use your legs, hands or seat a bit more independently? That is, when you used your legs, did your hands stay somewhat quieter than last week?

Regarding your riding:

1. Did you remember to use your legs before your hands more often?
2. Did you control your emotions a bit better so that you were more relaxed, patient, brave, or calm?
3. Did you stay slightly more focused throughout your ride?
4. Did you remember to breathe more often?
5. Did you reward your horse for every effort he made that was a bit closer to what you want as a finished product?

Regarding your horse:

1. Did he pick up the correct lead more often today?
2. Did he stay on the bit longer than he did last week?
3. Did you feel like you were having a better dialogue with your horse? That is, you were a bit clearer in what you were asking him to do, and he understood you better.
4. Did you start to teach your horse something new today?
5. Was he a little braver when faced with the scary tractor, a deer in the woods, or other horses passing too closely to him?

6. Did he go sideways a little more easily in your leg yields?

Regarding competition:

1. Did you ride into your corners better than you did last season?
2. Did you think throughout the majority of your ride?
3. Did your legs become less jelly-like?
4. Did you remember to smile more often than at the last show?
5. Were you able to objectively evaluate what went wrong and come up with a better plan for the next event?

Get the picture? Seeing things in shades of grey will keep you feeling optimistic any time you or your horse do anything that's just a little bit better.

I think one of the best ways to keep track of your shades of grey is to keep a daily journal of your rides.

Ask yourself, "Have things been a little bit better, not only within each ride, but also from day to day?" Then if you feel like you or your horse are just treading water and not improving, you can look back over your journal and see where you were last week, last month, or even last year. Your journal will help you keep things in perspective.

For example, maybe you're feeling frustrated because your horse doesn't stay on the bit during every canter depart. But when you look back at your journal, you'll see that two months ago, not only was he coming off the bit, but also he was racing off into the canter like he was possessed! By looking in your journal and seeing your progress, you can stay positive. You won't feel pressured that everything has to be perfect right now. Instead, you'll be content with shades of grey. And you'll find that all those "little bit betters" pretty quickly add up to a "whole lot better".

## **2. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.**

To have a great ride every day, be "great-ful"...I mean grateful. Not only will gratitude insure that every day and every ride is a great one, but also gratitude will actually attract more of the things you appreciate and value into your life. As simply as I can put it, when you start to get discouraged about your riding, remember these two little words: "Thank you".

Be grateful that you get to develop a relationship with these beautiful animals.

Be grateful that you get to spend time outdoors with your horse.

Be grateful your horse is sound.

Be grateful that you're healthy enough to ride.

Be grateful that you can make the time to ride.  
 Be grateful that you have a terrific riding teacher.  
 Be grateful for beautiful trails.  
 Be grateful for the awesome way your horse smells and the feel of his warm skin under your hand as you stroke his neck.  
 Be grateful for an indoor arena.  
 Be grateful for good rain gear because you don't have an indoor arena.

I think Leslie Thorsen from Vermont sums up an attitude of gratitude brilliantly in her article called, "It's Still Fun." Here's what Leslie has to say about the joy of riding and competing.

So, you've had your horse at an indoor arena all winter, and you have religiously worked with your trainer. Your horse's teeth have been floated, your saddle is newly flocked, and you know your test inside and out.

So what do you do when your horse has had the perfect warm up, his back is up, he is on your aids, but as you pass A to ride the perfect centerline, your little darling gallops like a Kentucky Derby horse (and he isn't even a thoroughbred!)?

You do what any blue-blooded dressage rider would do, you smile and say to yourself "Boy... this sure is fun!" And what you don't even realize at the time is you have already lost points before you have earned them (error -3).

Continuing on with the day, you help your daughter with her warm up. Right when the ring steward announces to her, "You are on deck", you detect the slightest lameness on the front right leg. The timing is impeccable! Could this be? Does this seasoned show horse actually now understand the meaning of the words, "You are on deck?" After a winter of complete and utter soundness, my daughter and I were still thinking how much fun we both were having when we had to scratch First level, test four.

And as the beautiful spring day began to unfold, I looked around and saw other riders deal with their expectations for their own horses. A stall mate remarked, "We can't move up because we can't get the flying changes." Yet, I saw an incredible sight. I saw that same rider with a great big smile on her face while she rode a beautiful Second level test. I saw all the preparations for Third level even though they still haven't found that bridge yet.

Her smile confirmed to me "Yep, she's still having fun."

I saw another rider with arthritis to beat the band. Yet, she painstakingly braided and prepared herself and her horse for a perfectly accurate and fabulously ridden Third level test. The joy she receives from this partnership makes her ignore her own pain. And yes, astonishingly enough, I have to admit... she is still having fun!

So, why do we keep coming back for more? With all the money spent on how to get the perfect bend, halt, and impulsion, we could be driving a Maserati, which by the way stops, goes, turns left and turns right the same way every time!! The answer to the question is because maybe your horse didn't have it in him that day to bring home the blue, or do the flying change, or trot the centerline, but it's all the other days that came before this one. All those days that developed the very privileged, and yet very humbling relationship we all have with our animals.

And finally, when the day is all said and done, and you are collapsing into your bed from sheer exhaustion, you realize somewhat sleepily to yourself, whether you win, lose, get eliminated, or have to scratch.....it's still fun!!!

### **3. Have a great ride every day by asking high-quality questions.**

I learned from peak performance expert Anthony Robbins the importance of asking high-quality questions. When you ask low-quality questions, your brain searches for an answer and can only come up with low-quality answers. Here are some low-quality questions: "Why does this always happen to me?" "Why am I so uncoordinated when I give the aids for lateral work?" "How come I always blank out and forget my test or course pattern in competition?"

The only kinds of answers your brain can come up with to questions like that are: "Because you don't deserve good things." "Because you're a lousy uncoordinated piece of do-do-do." "Because you're a mental midget."

Notice that low-quality questions often start with the words "Why?" or "How come?" As soon as you hear those words come out of your mouth, stop mid-sentence! Then, ask a better question.

Better questions would be: "What do I need to change in order to create the results I want?" "What exercises do I need to practice to become better coordinated during lateral work?" "What's the best way to memorize my test or pattern so if I momentarily blank out, I can quickly get back on track?"

I had to put this concept of asking better questions to the test recently. I was very excited that my Friesian, Moshi, was going to have his debut at Prix St Georges at one of the shows in Florida. By Thursday, Moshi had had his shampoo and beauty treatment, the trailer was packed, and I had my show clothes laid out.

Early Friday morning, I received a phone call telling me that Moshi's right eye was the size of golf ball. I called the vet immediately. She stained his eye and found an ulcer on the cornea. After treating his eye four times a day for three weeks, I'm happy to report that it healed perfectly, and he's doing well.

On the Friday morning of the show, however, my first reaction was to ask some lousy questions like "What if the ulcer gets infected and affects his sight?" "Why does he have to put his head so high that it's a struggle to medicate him?" and "How am I going to be able to find someone to help me hold him so I can treat him four times a day?" and "Just how much can you impose on your friends for help at all hours of the day and night?"

I had to give myself a huge half halt because those kinds of questions sent me down the wrong road emotionally. So I asked some better questions. I asked, "How can I use this to my advantage?" The answer was "Now I have a bit of extra time, and I can catch up on those projects piling up on my desk. I also asked, "What's good about this?" One answer was, "I have a super vet who came quickly, and diagnosed and treated him expertly." Another answer was that I had been working Moshi hard to prepare for the show, and it was good for his muscles to have some down time. But the best answer was, " His injury is not serious, and there will always be another show."

So, when "manure happens", have a great day every day, by ASKING A BETTER QUESTION such as, "What's good about this?" "What can I learn from this?" or "How can I use this?" Your answers will surely empower you.

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