

Multi-faceted horseman Dominique Barbier speaks with photographer & writer Keron Psillas on creating a deeper mental connection with your horse.

Keron: Dominique, since the publishing of *Dressage for the New Age*, (now in its fifth edition) you have been known as a trainer that connects with horses on a deep mental level. *Dressage for the New Age* is published in English, French, German and Portuguese. It continues to be one of the best-selling books on dressage ever. What can you add to this teaching now?



Dominique: This is a time of great crisis in the dressage world. We are, correctly, discussing the well-being of the horse and what is aggressive training and what is not. Ok, so this is a moment to affect change. What I would like to do is to have that change begin with your personal relationship with your horse. In the words of the great Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

What can I add to the teaching? Well it’s been a long time since the first edition of *Dressage for the New Age*: nearly 25 years. During that time the horses have continued to teach me and the strongest lesson that repeats over and over is that compassionate, sustainable, honorable riding comes from mental clarity.



Keron: How do you begin to teach this? It is quite different than saying, for instance, shorten your outside rein, or turn your shoulder.

Dominique: Yes, it is quite different. But we still must be aware of the position of the rider. When you are sitting in a correct, non-interfering position -- as I say position, not action -- then, with mental clarity, you can have your horse doing whatever you want.

Keron: Describe more fully the process of achieving mental clarity while riding.

Dominique: Mental clarity begins with intent. What is your intent for your time with your horse on that day? In that moment?

You begin on your trip to the barn to let go of your preoccupations with the other moments of the day or perhaps your worry about the moments to come later in the day/week/month. You must be there for your horse. Are you mechanically going about his grooming and tacking or are you there, listening to him, checking how he feels that day? Did you ask him if he would like to dance? And do you know the type of dance you want to have that day? What is your intent with your time together?

Then with the work-in-hand you begin the first few steps of the dance. Work-in-hand before you begin the longe will help to establish your connection. Is your horse with you and offering the movement easily, or is he resistant on one side or the other? Be with him....listen.

There is no room for pushing or aggression when you are truly listening. And then, begin your longe work. On the longe, there is a great deal of communication that gets established. You can send your horse forward in a rhythmic working trot by establishing the clarity of vision for that working trot in your mind and sending that vision, that rhythm, to the horse. On the longe the horse begins to respond to your mental cues. Yes, the click of the tongue and the whip is there to reinforce the message if he is a lazy boy or if you are not totally clear with your intent, but work on the clarity.

You can establish your mental communication in this way. Progressively then you can work on the transitions up and down through the gaits with your mental clarity and intent.

After some weeks of training, depending on the quality of your time together, you will have your horse moving forward and through transitions by your clarity and intent. Then you can take this ability to communicate with your horse to your riding. When you are sitting on top, with the same clarity that you achieved while longeing, and you are sitting with the intent of position ~ not action, then your horse will happily listen to you and progress through his training.

Keron: □ **OK. That is a lot to take in at once!**

Dominique: Yes and no. It is such a simple concept, but with all good teaching, it will be revealed in layers or levels. Along the way you will have little 'aha' moments. You will find those little nuggets of gold. Keep those moments, add to those moments...and eventually you will arrive to the place where it is all golden moments, aha moments.

Keron: Thank you, Dominique.

Dominique: Thank you.

Dominique and Debra Barbier own Barbier Farms in Healdsburg, where they offer a unique blend of classical dressage teaching, training, Lusitano expertise and equestrian travel opportunities. You can read more about this topic and get to know all about Barbier Farms on Dominique's Blog and Website: www.dominiquebarbier.com . You can see more of Keron's photography of beautiful Lusitanos from around the world on her site: www.keronpsillas.com

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