

**BOOK REVIEW – CLASSICAL RIDING CLUB**

**Training the Horse in Hand  
The Classical Iberian Principles**

**By Alfons J. Dietz**

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Anyone who has had the privilege of observing classical training in hand on the Iberian Peninsula knows why these horses achieve perfection and have wonderful mouths and temperaments. This book is a rare gem, written by someone who joined the Spanish Riding School of Vienna at the age of 15 years when its Director was the renowned Brigadier Kurt Albrecht. The author stayed with the Spanish Riding School for eight years before becoming independent and training Baroque horses. By coincidence he then acquired a Lusitano stallion Cartucho and was thereby drawn to Portugal and Spain where he readily acknowledges that his knowledge of the art of riding at the source of its origin was broadened.

His foreword contains the following words, which demonstrate the true classicist in him:

"The horse is like you and me, a living being with similar feelings; it has strengths but also faults and weaknesses that you sometimes have to accept and forgive."

The author reminds us that the riders of antiquity realised that the work in hand made many lessons easier for the horse and that we should recall the contribution of Antoine de Pluvinel in integrating work in hand into training. He also reminds us that the prerequisite for work in hand for both horse and rider require both physical and psychological elements in both.

I enjoyed the way the author introduced the reader to the Iberian School, pointing out that the work in hand is orientated towards the Pura Raza Espanol and the Lusitano, being horses that are extremely spirited with great manoeuvrability and that this type of schooling can only be carried out on a very limited scale with unresponsive horses. We learn from him the distinction between the Iberian School and the Viennese School, not only in the commonly understood sense but also in terms of the slight lack of impulsion which comes with the very high degree of collection perfected in Vienna.

The book is a very practical work, helping us with the weight and composition of lunge reins, whips, cavessons and surcingles and the position and use of the whip on the lunge and in long reins before dealing with the development of the work in long reins, moving to medium collection (start of the piaffe, travers, half pass and renvers) then full collection (pirouettes, flying changes, passage, series of changes).

I asked myself what could be the advantage of the work in hand, putting aside the development of the Spanish walk, the Spanish trot and levade, if the horse had already achieved all this in long reins and found my answer: every lesson that the horse has already learned on the long reins will be refined and

perfected in the step-by-step technique of training in hand, to produce a round outline and to move forward in perfect balance.

The author reminds us of the close contact required by this method and guides the reader through every stage of schooling for lateral work and piaffe and the development of the passage from piaffe, moving on to the Spanish walk, levade and pirouette. However, those of us with more limited abilities will find the author's guidance on the work required to achieve correct shoulder in invaluable. He helps the reader to engage the schooling through a stage where the horse feels comfortable performing it along the side of the arena without problems. He reminds us, as he should, that even in hand the shoulder in must every now and again be interrupted by a halt transition with the horse standing completely still and relaxed before moving into trot work at shoulder in. The transition into trot is made without straightening the horse and the author reminds us, as he should, that after a few strides the horse is half halted into walk then to trot again after some walk strides. I found this to be particularly helpful when used with the author's diagrams demonstrating lateral work in the Iberian method: shoulder in – turn on the haunches – counter shoulder in and transition to the half pass.

I loved the conclusion – a whole section on the "crowning glory" of work in hand – the free long reins. This is beautifully illustrated using the author's work with Cartucho. The final photograph shows the author riding this stallion at Spanish walk without a bridle: "the epitome of mutual trust" – and so it is.

I believe we can all learn from a practical book like this. Very few of us can achieve the gait and perfection which Alfons Dietz demonstrates but we can all achieve some or much of it; how much will depend on our own skills and on our horses. What we can gain from this beautifully illustrated and constructive work is the intellectual stimulation that classical riding has given us all.

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