

Self-Carriage
A Book to Make Horse
Training and Riding Easy



The 'Train Your Eye' Series

by Eloise King
with Desirée LaRoche

Self-Carriage

*A Book to Make Horse Training and Riding
Easy*

*The Train Your Eye Series
Book I*

*By Eloise King
With Desirée LaRoche*

For more information, blogs, or to contact us:

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Other Books by
Eloise King &
Desirée LaRoche

Forward: Riding with Eloise King
A Horse Training Manual For Beginner Through Advanced

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Train Your Eye



This “Train Your Eye” series is to help you get a solid footing on what to look for in your horse as you are training him. This book presents pictures of horses that have been trained correctly to be everything you would want in a horse, i.e. in self-carriage, balanced, light on the bit, engaged behind with relaxed impulsion, super attentive to the rider, supple, with strong, high backs and powerful hindquarters.

I don’t know if you have ever run into the situation where you are sure the horse and/or rider is doing one thing, but someone else tells you that what you saw was incorrect and you did not see what you thought you saw. Soon, if they are good talkers or are supposed to know something about the subject, you find yourself doubting what you saw. It is especially true when the majority is saying — “This is what it really is.” Doesn’t that remind you of the story, *The Emperor’s New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen?

Because of this all too common state of affairs, I am starting each booklet with this article by B. A. Coles, which is an extract from *Horse and Hound*, London — 26 Nov. 1966. (The pictures in my copy were too dark, so I inserted pictures in which the position of the horses and riders are almost exactly the same as the original photos.)

So how is it that even though the images in this article clearly show one thing, what is said about them by the “authority” is very much the opposite? I imagine there are many answers to that complex question.

The following article demonstrates that no matter how much of an “authority” someone is, what they say can be taken with a grain of salt. It is actually a constant in much of the riding community. Don’t be taken in and become part of someone else’s agenda. Look and decide for yourself.

I want you to know that you are seeing what is actually there. Sometimes it just takes believing in yourself and what you see or sense. Reach beyond the misconceptions and experience so much more than those who will not examine what is in front of them (for who knows what reason). Trust yourself and what you see. Trust your horse and how he responds. Trust that you can create a fantastic horse in any equine discipline.

WHAT THE DRESSAGE CAMERA SAW

SIR,—I have very little knowledge of high school dressage so I would not attempt to cross swords with such an authority as Col. Crossley.

But I must question the remarks in his letter (November 5) when he refers to a booklet containing photographs of Senhor Oliveira and says that: “Not one of them shows a loose rein.”

I, too, have a copy of this booklet entitled “Haute Ecole” (I presume there is only one by Oliveira) and the section below of the picture on page 31 shows the Maestro riding on what I think most people would agree was definitely a *loose* rein.

Further, in my copy of the booklet, while most pictures certainly indicate a *light* contact, there are several others that show the rein equally loose.

I must admit, that, as a charming spectacle, I much prefer to see this dignified and elegant form of riding in the manner of the old Masters; that is why I greatly admired Senhor Oliveira’s exhibition at Wembley. But whether or not this method produces better dressage than, say, a firmer hold on the horse’s head, I leave it to the experts to argue about.



... and of Vienna.

As a matter of interest, however, on browsing through my copy of *The Spanish Riding School*, by Alois Podhajsky, published some years ago, I am unable to find in it any photographs of the famous Lipizzaners being ridden on a rein as loose or as light as that apparently adopted by Oliveira.

As Col. Crossley said of Oliveira, I presume the author of *The Spanish Riding School* was satisfied with the story told by the photographs of the work at the school. So one assumes he would approve of the hold on the head shown in the second

picture here, which is a section of one of a horse in an almost identical position to that of Oliveira’s.

I suppose the tautness of the reins suggested in this picture of work at the Spanish Riding School may well be necessary to achieve the animal’s complete obedience or submission.

Perhaps it is what Col. Crossley would term “light contact”? And no doubt it would be considered correct for producing certain high school dressage.

How such taut reins pulling on a horse’s head and neck, however, can produce a mouth as “light as silk,” which Col. Crossley assures us is the case, rather puzzles me.

B. A. COLES, Brighton.



The style of Oliveira . . .

Dedicated To — Nuno Oliveira

Nuno knew that training horses was simple. He also knew that each horse was different and would require the trainer to see that and be willing to listen to the horse — see, feel, study. Nuno studied and knew each horse he trained. He knew that he did not need to control the horse; he only needed to find a kind way to get their cooperation. And that was simple for him because horses are basically very cooperative creatures. Trial and error will always come into play as you work with any horse so PLAY!

Nuno said to Eloise on several occasions, “I’m afraid people will not learn to like horses in my lifetime.”

Nuno may have looked at it that way, but I believe that the majority of riders really do like their horses. They just may not understand how incredibly sensitive horses are. Since horses are such big animals plus they communicate and respond very differently than a person would to stimuli, it is easy to understand that people may think they have to use force to aid them. But if you establish a quiet and clear way of communicating with the horse, the horse picks it up in an astoundingly short time. From there the rider/trainer can carry on, hopefully picking up signals from the horse as quickly as the horse is able to understand our aids.

One thing Nuno was adamant about was, *“In all exercises, the horse must be given the clearest idea of what is expected of him.”* Quote taken from, *“Reflections on Equestrian Art.”* And as Eloise says, *“One or two aids, so there is no confusion.”*

Eloise demonstrates this principle so well in her story of Treasaro. (To be released soon.) In it, she also shows the love and respect that she has for each horse that she trains. Eloise’s work also honors the man who gave us so much profound information for training our horses.

An interesting tidbit about Nuno Oliveira:

When Nuno had a saddle made, he would have the saddler use the softest leather possible on the saddle flaps. In that way, if the rider’s legs did not remain soft, the saddle would have tell-tale rub marks on it.

The following are a few of Nuno Oliveira’s quotes that help to explain how he rode so that he would not wear rub marks into his buttery-soft saddle flaps:

“When your legs are hard, you risk a horse that is hard in your hand.”

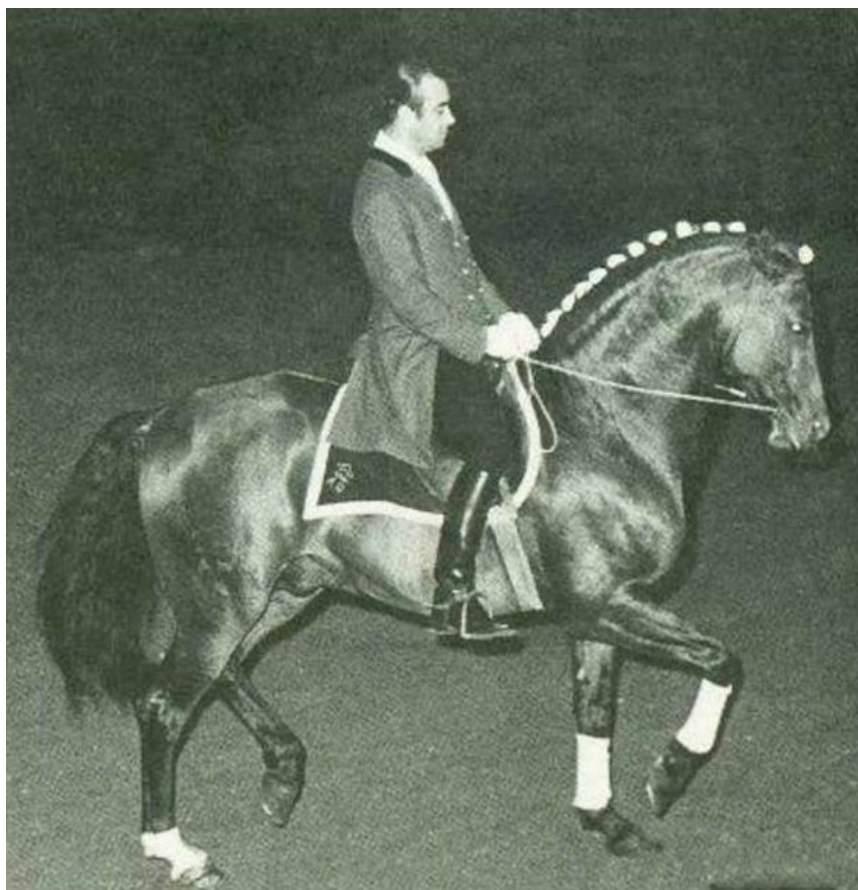
“If you continuously act with your legs, you don’t give the horse a chance to go completely on his own. And you could squander an advantage resulting in a lack of sensitivity and a waste of aids.”

“The legs have to give and take, just like the hands.”

“I don’t want riders who work physically hard. Work by thinking.”

“Mistakes of the legs show up in the horse’s mouth.”

(Nuno’s quotes are from Eloise King and/or artisticdressage.com)



Picture 1

The string shows very light contact. I love how the stallion is listening so intently — check out his ears. Nuno demonstrates why he deserves the stallion's attention: notice his light seat aid with almost no leg or hand. Study this picture — note the stallion's relaxation, strong abdominal muscles, back, and so much more.

INTRODUCTION

Eloise always says — A picture will show what it takes a thousand words to convey.



Picture 2

If the rider keeps their aids light, the horse will be in self-carriage and carry you effortlessly giving you delightful trail rides.

Nothing is more true than when showing what self-carriage is!!!

She is adamant about training your eye so that you have the best idea of what you are working toward. If you know what the horse should look like during different stages/levels of training, you can become the best rider and horse trainer possible.

A significant part of the problem in horse training and riding is that much of the knowledge of developing horses as Eloise does has been lost over the years and, many times, replaced by harsher methods. Consequently, many do not have the knowledge or skill to train the horse in this delightful way.

Eloise can show you how to get the results many only claim they are getting. Her gymnastics for the horse will show you a way that you can be kinder, as was Nuno's hope, and still be competitive. Eloise's gymnastics aren't just for creating a dressage horse; they are for building athletes.

You may see things throughout this book that others might say is showing something different than what we are saying it is. I would again refer you to the article “What the Dressage Camera Saw” and urge you to decide for yourself what you are actually seeing.

I shall endeavor to use as few words possible and let the pictures speak for themselves.

NOTE: All but eight of the pictures are of horses that have been trained by, or their trainer has worked with, Eloise King and four of those eight were trained by Nuno.

SELF-CARRIAGE

Self-carriage is the horse carrying himself and the rider; not the rider carrying the horse.



<—This is a young horse being trained to be carried by the rider. The horse is heavy on the bit, it is not able to lengthen its frame (even though it looks as if it would like to), its hind quarters are blocked ... Out on the trail with so many beautiful things to see and the horse gets to look at the ground.

As this type of training progresses, the neck shortens even more, the frame compresses, the hind quarters drag behind, the hind legs are not able to track up into the front hoof prints. — >



<—This is a young horse in training to carry the rider. The hind legs are tracking up into front hoof prints, his frame is lengthening, he is in self-carriage, and has a long, beautiful neck developing which will rise out of his withers in a most elegant way as he learns to step under himself more with lowered hind quarters.

A horse in self-carriage has been 'sent to the bit' —the bit has not been pulled back to the horse's mouth. Because there has been so much misinterpretation of the term 'on the bit,' Eloise teaches how to send the horse 'to the bit' because it describes so clearly what should happen when riding and training. From that point, the horse's back and hindquarters can be built up through gymnastics until he can step under himself to carry more of his and the rider's weight. Throughout all this, the training employed must keep the horse relaxed so those muscles that are being worked develop properly. If the horse is pushed onto the bit, his muscles will be tense, true forward blocked, and self-carriage is usually unattainable. Correctly applied gymnastics are essential. A soft seat, not strong legs, is your primary aid.

Developing a horse that is in self-carriage must start at the very beginning of training when one first mounts the horse.

To lay the correct foundation for developing the horse, the saddle must be properly placed on the horse's back; not up on the withers, and not unevenly on the horse's back. See: [Forward: Riding with Eloise King](#) for pointers on that. Then the rider must be sitting on the horse, on the saddle; not in a forward seat or a three-point position — just sitting there.



Picture 3 — Correct saddle placement

If you want to develop a horse that can carry you, not the other way around, the rider must do their utmost to be correct. Again: [Forward: Riding with Eloise King](#) to learn the fastest, easiest ways to accomplish this.



Picture 4

Another young horse learning to carry his rider.

Even though he is a horse that had a tendency to want to be heavy on the front end, the training this horse received from Eloise was always forward and free. You can see the results of the gymnastics Eloise uses in the following Picture 5 — This Dutch Warmblood gelding's hind quarters and back are now so strong he easily executes a square halt on a light rein.



Picture 5 — *Square halt in self-carriage*

In order to maintain a correct position, the reins must not be short. Especially when starting out, one does not want to have contact 99% of the time. When one sees short reins, they are always at the expense of the seat. Short reins will make the rider forward so that the seat (rider's weight) is off the back of the horse.

Then, one must not begin riding by learning the rein aids, but by learning how to feel. So if you develop riding with freedom, relaxation, and happiness, most instructors will be able to make you pretty. If you learn pretty first, it stifles many from ever learning to feel.



Picture 6

This stallion has been allowed to go forward. As Eloise's gymnastics build his back and hind quarters, he will be able to step under himself with his hind legs without tension and the purity of all his gaits will not be disturbed.

Your position is so important; not sitting pretty; sitting correctly. The following quotes from Nuno Oliveira's fabulous book, *Reflections on Equestrian Art*, expand on this point.

The Rider's Position

"It is only with a good position and a supple horse that the rider may succeed in stabilizing his hands, thus being certain of never pulling on the horse's mouth."

Horses Held With/Without Contact.

"I regret very much that so many riders are not acquainted with the book "Extérieur et Haute Ecole," written by Captain Beudant.

"Therein it may be read that it is only by allowing horses to move on a free rein, and not in holding them in, that success may be obtained. Riders who hold in their horses are insignificant riders and will never advance.

“Riders who give their horses freedom are those who will taste the delicacies of equestrian art.”

When training a horse, you must start by working/training/gymnastically building the hind quarters of the horse. To a great degree, you can almost forget that there is a front end of the horse to work with. When you do use the reins, it should be in such a way that they do not block the horse at all. This is possible even when halting and during a rein-back. It is so easy to block or restrict forward in a horse especially at the beginning of training.

The idea of using your body as an aid, to the extent that Nuno Oliveira did and Eloise King does, can sometimes be a bit hard to grasp. I know that many can relate more to thinking — *Push to go. Pull to stop or steer.* — much as one would do with a car. But if you wish to really engage the horse’s hind quarters, one must focus on them and learn how to keep the use of the reins to a minimum. Aids for the horse can be so subtle it is as if they are reading your mind; **they can be trained to be that attentive to what you are asking.** You simply have to start training in a way that allows that to happen. *You have to whisper — not shout from the very first contact with the horse.*

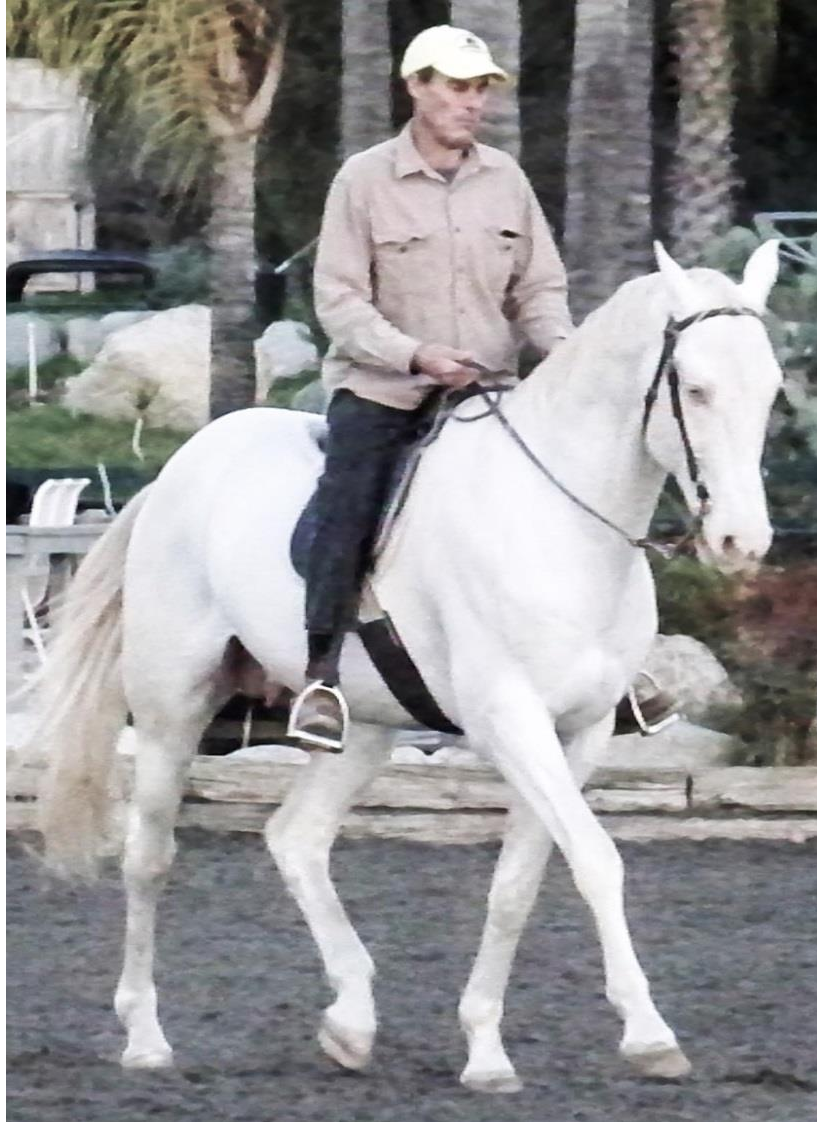
So as you are sitting correctly, (don’t be afraid to check your position often) allow the horse to move off. Eloise hates the words, “Prepare to walk,” “Prepare to trot,” etc. When a rider moves around to (so called) *prepare*, the horse has felt many aids, most of which have nothing to do with asking the horse to move forward.

Rather ... ask walk or trot, etc. and accept what the horse gives you. Then, if needed, ask more or less. The horse will tell you if you asked too forcefully or if he did not hear you. Make sure you simply ask again. You do not need to give more aids. That will only serve to confuse the horse by making him think you are asking for something different.



Picture 7

Keep it simple, keep it light, and use your gymnastics to get superb balance, engagement, and impulsion. Is this horse 'on the bit'? You bet your sweet pirouette he is! He has been sent 'to the bit', he is engaged behind, attentive to the rider, and has established the contact necessary for him (this particular horse) so that communication can flow from rider to horse and back again.



Picture 8

Here is a rider, Clyde Cottingham, who is doing gymnastics with Eloise's Akhal-Teke stallion. Notice how balanced and gentle the rider is. He is riding with a little Western curb bit. The horse is happy and listening to his rider; note the horse's ears.

At no point do you need to grab the reins; you have asked something of the horse, accept what the horse gives you. By accepting what the horse gives you and not grabbing at the reins to change what you have just told the horse to do, you can now easily understand how the horse interpreted the aid you gave him. You know how to ride. If you just observe how the horse responds to your aids, it will tell you whether you need to ask more or less, etc. The horse needs to feel confidence, not control. Soon they learn their job and will carry us.



Picture 9

If your horse is in self-carriage, you can put a beginner on his back and he will carry her so that she can learn to feel as she learns to ride. Her smile says it all!

When one is ready to start trotting:

Posting should be performed by softly letting your weight sink all the way down into the stirrups; not squeezing the horse with your legs to get up and down. Another way of saying that would be; Do not irritate the horse by doing something that is so unnecessary and counter-productive to boot. Make it simple, because it *is* so very simple.

The trot moves the rider up, and we control our coming back to the saddle by having our weight down into the stirrups. Your legs will have a soft, elastic feel to them.

Eloise said the best expression she ever heard for posting was George Morris saying “to kiss the saddle” not flopping back and then having to lift yourself up again. Practicing this in a forward seat position will help one to become light because here one’s weight is already in the stirrups. Eloise doesn’t mind seeing the hands with the reins placed on the neck of the horse, in front of the withers. That too can help. It also teaches your hands to remain independent from your body.



Picture 10

Notice how far back the shoulder muscles of the horse come. Therefore placing the saddle further rearward on the horse's back is so important to keep from binding and altering the development and working of those muscles.

Learning to sit the trot:

Try to sit in a relaxed manner (so the horse can stay relaxed also) with your seat under you for a few strides. *Seat under you, i.e. you are sitting more on the back of your buttocks.* Legs long and relaxed, too. If you lose the relaxed feeling, then post again; then try sitting again. Keep going back and forth and you will get the hang of it.

Do what you have to do to keep your hands steady such as place both little fingers on the front of the saddle. An added bonus of this will be that you are now riding with your thumbs up! *"In the trot, the hip has to trot, not the hand."* Nuno Oliveira.



Picture 11

Notice the strong belly muscles and back; so important for self-carriage.

In the past many masters used the canter to teach the sitting, as the horse's trot can be and often is bouncy causing one to want to hang on, losing the correct balance and relaxed seat. Here again, one does not have to hang on to the reins in the canter. Keep relaxed and use your circles with an opening inside rein to establish the speed you want.

Always remember, the strongest aid is the seat! — NOT the hands. SEAT — LEGS — then the HANDS.

I am always inspired when I look at pictures of Nuno Oliveira in which you can actually see that he has simply pushed his tummy forward and up as an aid. Horses are so sensitive and can be worked in such a manner that they will respond beautifully to this and other subtle aids of the seat.



Picture 12

The maestro

An example of a subtle aid of the seat would be:

You can collect the horse in the canter, when he is strong enough, by lightly moving your seat, not down into the horse's back, but from the back of the saddle to the front, in a fluid, scooping motion, into soft, stationary hands. Essentially, you are moving your hips toward your hands. Remember to follow the horse's movement; do not pump your upper body. That is such an awkward looking and inefficient way to ride a horse. You can look elegant — less is always more when riding.

"One has to have an immobile hand with mobile fingers." Nuno Oliveira.



Picture 13

This horse's neck is rising properly and elegantly out of his withers. And again, strong belly muscles = rectus abdominis muscles. This helps to give you a strong back to sit on.

With all this the horse will be developing his back as he is now carrying the rider's weight; and his neck, as he is now carrying the bridle.

But it is a good while before one sees the muscles of the back and neck developing. Horses and humans develop muscle at a similar rate. So if you start an exercise program at the same time your horse starts, it will give you an idea of the timetable for his muscular development.

Sorry folks but "Rome was not built in a day." And to get the ride you want, you do want those muscles developed.



Picture 14

Things you can do to speed this process up:

Lunging, work-in-hand, shoulder-in, transitions, ride lots of trails with varying conditions, etc. All these things help. Besides, riding isn't supposed to be work. All this can be fun! Again, the correct way to train these gymnastics is explained in [Forward: Riding with Eloise King](#).

Trail riding is the same as ring work in that you should not be on the horse's mouth.



Picture 15

Eloise mentioned to me — I must have had good training in my early years because it was not until I worked with Nuno Oliveira that he explained to me that my horses were in self-carriage. As I look back at photos, I can now see that.

Bonus Material

Here is an article that I wrote many years ago. It describes some of the things I did to train my eye:

A Beautiful Horse

By Eloise King

The time has come to openly admit that there is a split about dressage in this country. I have been telling my students for years that there are two kinds of dressage: artistic and competitive.

On my last three trips to Europe, I have looked at all the art I could find that included a horse. I saw all the movements of dressage in etching, paintings, tapestries, statues and books. I now feel that artistic and classical dressage are one and the same.

In classical art, one sees horses on loose reins, but with complete collection and self-carriage. The hind quarters are always strong and well-developed. The horses show strong backs. The saddles are placed well back on the horse, often with a crupper. The word that always came to my mind as I looked was “balance.”



Picture 16

Whether you are looking at a horse carrying a knight-in-armor in a battle scene on a large, almost draft animal, or a lovely little Arabian with a draped light rider, you see the same balance. This is the same balance seen whenever you see horses truly working. Examples are the Western cutting horse, the horse of an avid foxhunter who is out all day three days a week, etc. A working horse is always allowed freedom and develops his strength and carriage without force. A cowboy cannot grip, force and hold a horse together eight hours a day. A knight-in-armor had to be balanced: he could not ride any other way in his cumbersome attire. If the horse were not also in balance, he would lose his knight.



Picture 17

This horse has been built up gymnastically and has retained his soft, sensitive mouth. The best way to help this horse as he works is for you to stay balanced and leave him alone. One look at this horse's face will tell you that. He is working, he knows his job, leave him alone and let him do it

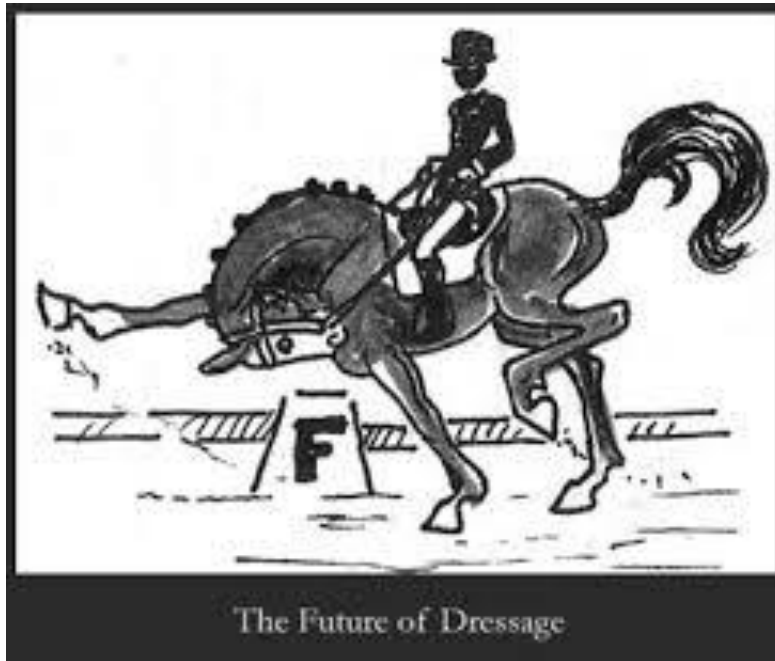
Balance comes to a horse through freedom and exercise. It does not come through force, holding and pushing. A rider does not have to be strong. Some of the loveliest moments I have ever seen were created by a beautiful, delicate lady in a side saddle.



Picture 18

A horse must become lighter and more responsive each day in his training. In the end, a small child should be able to Passage, Piaffer, and flying change. Then you have classical, artistic dressage. A beautiful horse.

And here is a fun picture I found that shows where you might be heading if you keep holding onto those reins and driving with your seat and legs.



Picture 19

The “Train Your Eye” Series is given to you to help you gain the cooperation of your horse. It always helps to know what your goal is at each stage of training. These picture books will do that.

To get you started right or help you move forward with the riding and training you have already begun, see [Forward: Riding with Eloise King](#). Its lunging, work-in-hand, and mounted work instruction is straightforward and easy to follow.

See: eloiseking.com

About Eloise

Eloise King has worked with horses since 1946. She studied in Portugal under Nuno Oliveira from 1972 until his death in 1989. She believes in reward instead of punishment and in the subtleties of classical dressage. Her focus is on in-hand work, non-competitive dressage, and suppling the horse. She rides and shows side saddle, hunters, endurance, and dressage training level through Grand Prix. She has worked with all breeds including working daily with 4-5 hot and warm-blooded horses. Eloise King started riding at the age of 5, then began training ponies and horses at the age of 9. She soon rode and showed hundreds of show and hunter ponies. Eloise has been on the top ten trainer list in the United States and a USDF Bronze award winner. Eloise has competed internationally at Prix St. Georges. She has been a big R licensed dressage judge. Her horses have won awards such as Mid-Atlantic Dressage Champions at third and fourth levels and one of the top horses nationally at third level. In show jumping, she was the youngest open jumping competitor at Madison Square Garden. She competed in Medal hunter seat equitation and qualified for the MaClay finals. She lives in California.

Eloise wrote the following — The end of World War II was also the end of gas rationing in the United States. Now I could have riding lessons. Soon I was “The Jockey” for Deborah Dows of Southland Farms in Rhinebeck, New York. She would have up to thirty ponies a year to break in. I then moved on to jumpers and I believe I still hold the record for being the youngest jump rider in Madison Square Gardens in New York. Next were years spent fox hunting, training, riding race horses, and even timber & brush horses. Soon I was eventing (3 phase military riding) my passion moved to dressage when in 1972 I met and started to study under Nuno Oliveira.

I graduated from the first United States Dressage Federation’s learner judges program put on by the Potomac Valley Dressage Assoc., and received my big R from the American Horse Show Assoc., as a recognized judge.

Anyone familiar with the late Nuno Oliveira or his son Juan will immediately recognize the complete training and influence of the “Oliveira School” in all my work. I was most fortunate to have devoted myself to the great master. Mr. Oliveira was so complete a horseman and master that I have never needed to look in any other direction. By listening to the horses, and with his work, the horses I train are always happy, relaxed, and correct.

About Desirée

I grew up in a rural area of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the daughter of a lumberjack. I learned to ride without a saddle, exploring the backwoods trails. I've generally ridden for pleasure and do whatever seems fun at the time. This would include combined training, barrel racing, Western Pleasure, but the best for me is dressage a la Eloise King.

With Eloise's help, I wrote the book: [Forward: Riding with Eloise King](#). I am now living in Spokane, Washington with my husband and dogs.

For more information, blogs, and to contact us:

Eloiseking.com



*'Forward: Riding with Eloise King'
was written to help you have a better
experience training and riding your horse.
This picture book was created to make
the fabulous experience you get
from 'Forward' even easier.*