

in 1971, David came to England to study for his BHS exams at Crabbet Park. He worked under various trainers including Robert Hall and took his BHS Instructors exam in 1973.

He decided to further his experience by working in Europe. After studying under von Neindorf, and a spell as an instructor at an Austrian riding club, he had the great good fortune to be offered a place for six months as a pupil of the Spanish Riding School.

Abandoning his plans to return to Britain, David committed himself to that fountain head of classical horsemanship, determined to exploit his good fortune to the full.

On leaving Vienna, he took a two-month course at Saumur before moving to Germany to work under Paul Stecken at the Westphalian State Riding School. It was at this point that fate dealt David another ace! Dr Reiner Klimke was looking for someone to work his young horses and, on the recommendation of Herr Stecken, he saw David ride and offered him the job.

David stayed six months with Reiner Klimke, riding all the horses and learning directly from the master himself. Although invited to stay longer, he felt it was time to begin building his own career. He returned to England and shortly afterwards set up at Bartestree.

Techniques For Success

I asked David to tell me what were his particular methods of training and instruction. Had he any particular techniques on which he laid emphasis and on which he considered his success to be based? I got an answer that is becoming very familiar. An answer which you get from nearly every horseman who has achieved success and prominence: "There are no 'secrets' of the trade! No special 'wrinkles' used by professionals and guaranteed to bring success. Success in horsemanship is based, and can only be based, on the principles of classical horsemanship. Principles universal in Europe and known to all. But, sadly, very often ignored or misunderstood in Britain."

This is a subject on which David is passionate. His

missionary zeal was aroused by the need to answer a question. A question posed to him, time and time again, by top riders and trainers on the Continent, "Why, when it was generally acknowledged in Europe at least up to the end of the Great War, that British horses were the best in the world; why, in the space of little more than two generations, has Britain been left so far behind in the breeding, training and riding of competition horses?"

As his knowledge and experience of the British equestrian world broadened, David began to see the answer to this question outlined with a stark clarity. In Britain, it appeared to him, the principles of classical horsemanship had simply been forgotten. That they had once been known, understood and applied was self evident. Our past reputation as riders, breeders and trainers stood testimony to that. But modern British horsemen, with few and honourable exceptions, had little understanding of classical principles, and were, in their efforts to match continental standards, simply floundering in the dark! Aware of the root problem, David was able to identify the particular factors which had led to this state of affairs.

He began to realise that the 'cult of the show horse', that is the ideal of the elegant, harmonious horse, irrespective of its athletic ability; had infiltrated every level of British equestrianism. Breeders of competition horses, that is, sturdy workmanlike horses of scope and athletic ability, simply received no recognition or recompense. Performance recording of competition sires was virtually non-existent and stallions, particularly Thoroughbreds, were being selected in large numbers as breeding sires, solely on the basis of their pleasing conformation.

Hunting Theory

David proposed an interesting theory to account for this phenomenon. He suggested that its roots lie in the degeneration of foxhunting, a sport which in the 19th century required a high standard of horsemanship to follow hounds across unrestricted country, and was

now debased to little more than 'follow my leader' over more or less prepared hunt jumps. A sport demanding little in the way of horsemanship from its participants. In those former times, Masters of Foxhounds were required, by the demands of their calling, to be accomplished horsemen. Very rightly such people were called on to set the standards of general horsemanship. They acted as judges and as breeders and generally set high standards in all aspects of equestrianism. That tradition persists strongly to this day. Hunting people still provide the majority of show judges. They populate the committees of Breed Societies and the governing bodies of the various riding disciplines.

David makes the point that, in his opinion, because of the lower level of riding ability required by modern hunting, many of these influential people are not horsemen in any meaningful sense of the word. Many do not understand the fundamental techniques of horsemanship and the principles of pedigree and performance testing and the evaluation of competition results as a guide to breeding.

He is emphatic that, until we in Britain revolutionise our equestrian organisation, we have little hope of making serious progress towards parity with our continental rivals. He is emphatic too, that we must take our judges and selectors only from the ranks of those who have proved themselves in international competition or who have a background solidly based in scientific breeding methods or classical horsemanship. We must give the greatest prominence to competitions designed to select young performance horses and recognise traditional show classes, based only on pleasing conformation, elegance and good manners, as a distracting anachronism.

As to judging standards, he feels these must be based on function rather than on a pre-set ideal. That is, the judge must look at the horse's individual features, legs, back, neck, etc, and ask himself how does the conformation of each of these factors add to the horse's ability as a functional athlete. Such show judging should be applied

only to young stock and judging standards should have a positive relationship with the performance evaluation of mature animals. In this way, shows become a clear indicator to breeders that they are producing the type of horses which perform and which riders require to buy.

Future Improvement

Finally, I asked David if he could put his finger on any single factor vital to the improvement of riding and training in Britain. He had absolutely no hesitation in answering. He said, "Our greatest problem is our general misapprehension concerning the meaning of the term 'Dressage'. In Britain there was an entrenched attitude which considered dressage as a separate discipline which has little to do with 'real riding'; show jumping, cross-country and hunting. The reality is the exact reverse. Dressage is simply the application of classical principles in a systematic way to produce a horse and rider truly capable of achievement in any of the disciplines. Without this basic understanding, consistent success on the personal, as well as on the international level, is simply not possible."

Only a few years ago, David's strongly held views would have been dismissed as 'cranky'. Not any longer. The whole tenor of British equestrianism is changing, slowly but surely, in the direction he has been pointing. We are getting our act together. The British Horse Project to identify and record the performance of every horse in Britain is soon to be up and running. Youngstock classes based on the continental model, where judging standards are 'performance related' are gaining greater and greater prominence. Yet, if we are to achieve truly high and consistent results on the international stage, we desperately need more such people as David Pincus. Trainers who are not afraid to speak their mind on the important issues and, at the same time, to show by practical example what can be achieved by a true understanding of the art and practice of riding.

EXPERIENCE