

# AMBITION AND ABILITY

In this day and age many demands are made on instructors, regardless of which sport they teach. This also holds true for riding instructors. Our clients expect a lot from us. They have big ambitions, but perhaps they lack the ability and the will to match. Or the rider may have the ambition and the ability, but not a capable horse. If we have students that fall into this category, we can be sure that sooner or later there will be a problem, and often the instructor will be blamed for the student's failures.

As instructors, there are times when we have to accept this blame, not because we teach or ride poorly, but because we don't address the problem soon enough. And once things have started to go badly it is easy to lose the student's respect. If we wait too long to tell the student that his horse doesn't have the necessary abilities, the student will react defensively to this news and it will become increasingly more difficult to maintain a good relationship with him.

## WHY DON'T WE TELL THE TRUTH?

There are many reasons we avoid the truth. These are just a few:

**We are afraid to lose the student.** This is unquestionably a very difficult subject to bring up with a student, and there is a chance that the student will not agree. He may think that the instructor just can't see how talented he and his horse are, and that it is best to find someone else to teach him.

**We don't want to hurt the student's feelings.** This is unavoidable when we have to say something critical about a student's horse, but there is no doubt that the longer we wait, the more it will hurt.

**We might avoid the truth for economic reasons.** Perhaps we can't afford to lose the student so we avoid taking the risk. This is not a good excuse, since we are likely to lose him at a later date anyway. And when we lose a student this way, our reputation suffers.

**We are afraid another instructor might succeed where we could not.** In this case, cooperating with other instructors by sharing knowledge and asking advice would be a much better solution than letting the problem persist until we lose the student.

As you make decisions about discussing this subject with your student, keep in mind that it often takes a long time to get to know horse and rider well enough to make a realistic assessment of

their capabilities and potential. Until then, it is best to avoid discussing your doubts with your student.

Do not be afraid to question the information you hear at clinics you attend. Don't believe that everything you see and hear in a clinic is going to work for you. It is very important for all of us to develop our own way - our own philosophy.

It is also a good idea to expand our knowledge in areas other than riding and teaching. Take advantage of clinics and other opportunities to learn more about subjects such as shoeing, saddle fitting, physiology, and health issues. For example, we often see horses that are shod incorrectly or are badly trimmed. This destroys the horse's way of going, creates pain, and in the worst cases damages the horse for life. If we don't have a basic understanding of shoeing, it is impossible to have an educated discussion with the farrier. Furthermore, farriers appreciate the input of the instructor, and are more than happy to work together to make the best decisions for the horse. The same thing holds true for the other subjects.