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## **Five stars international dressage judge Vincenzo Truppa affirms he doesn't understand anymore how is it possible for judges to award high scores to top riders whose horse head position is behind the vertical.**



O' Judge Vincenzo Truppa (photo © DRESSAGE-international.com).

*"I honestly ask myself how much FEI rules are still worth?"* Says Italian O' Judge **Vincenzo Truppa**, in an exclusive interview to DRESSAGE-international.com and our Italian sister website tuttoDRESSAGE.it, in Lyon where the second leg of the Reem Acra FEI World Cup is under way.

*"We keep watching horses that are short in the neck and...and judges still award them high scores, something strange is going on in dressage I think it is better the FEI explains us how things are."* Exclaims Vincenzo Truppa that is in Lyon as trainer for her daughter Valentina Truppa competing here in the World Cup.

*"I was talking last morning with German trainer Monica Theodorescu about what I am saying, in my opinion the only ones that rode Thursday's Grand Prix here in Lyon as correctly indicated by the FEI rules are Dorothee Schneider, Fabienne Luetkemeier and my daughter Valentina."*

It is FEI Handbook (2011) that provides rules for judges that clarify the criteria for assigning scores during a dressage test. Article 101 generally describes the objectives in a dressage test; it reads as follows:

*"The head should remain in a steady position, as a rule slightly in front of the vertical, with a supple poll as the highest point of the neck, and no resistance should be offered to the Athlete."*

What this means for the judges is that the head position of the horse should be taken in consideration in the judging of every exercise.

*“The JSP’s member have recently resigned from their position because thier hands are tied, there is no real willingness to improve and better check judging, FEI wants to mantain the status quo and leave things as they are”.*

*“Rules are stated clearly what remains unclear is their application!”* Concludes Enzo Truppa in this exclusive interview with DRESSAGE-international.

DRESSAGE-international.com is going to make a more in depth report on this subject.

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Dr. Cook’s comment:

How refreshing to read this protest from Vincenzo Truppa.

Competition rules for horse sports in the 21st century should be based on what a horse needs to be free of fear, pain and other physiological discomforts. FEI Article 101 is based on what was thought acceptable in 1921 when the FEI was founded, nearly a hundred years ago. It is tradition-based rather than science-based. Since then, knowledge has advanced and exposed serious flaws in Article 101, yet the rules have not been updated to bring them into compliance with science. As a result, Article 101 continues to embody three requirements that are diametrically opposed to the welfare of the horse.

*“The head should remain in a steady position, **as a rule slightly in front of the vertical**, with a supple poll as the highest point of the neck, and no resistance should be offered to the Athlete.”* [FEI Article 101]

While I agree it would be an ethical improvement on the present situation in which FEI judges flout even this rule, nevertheless, FEI Article 101 still mandates requirements that are pathophysiological.

When ridden for dressage in a neck strap, a horse tells us what we need to know about where and how he needs to carry his head and neck. This is the physiological ‘model’ that the FEI should adopt in order to comply with their own objective that, at all times, the welfare of the horse should be paramount.

First, any horse required to perform athletically should be allowed the freedom of its ‘balancer,’ the head and neck. Anything less is akin to expecting a human athlete to compete with their neck in a plaster cast. Secondly, the exercising horse should be allowed to breathe freely. It cannot do this with its poll flexed and one or more painful foreign bodies in its mouth.

Bridle-free dressage tells us that a horse chooses to carry his head not ‘*slightly in front of the vertical*’ but well in front of the vertical. A nasal bone at 45 degrees to the vertical would be closer to a physiological position. Furthermore, such performances tell us that, at the walk and canter, the head should not be in a ‘*steady position*’ but free to

move in a vertical arc. The 'head bob' is necessary for balancing and is also an energy-saving device. Both are the result of millions of years of evolution and are disregarded to our shame.

The only part of Article 101 that is theoretically compatible with the physiology of the horse is that "*no resistance should be offered to the athlete.*" But even here, the rule is contradicted by dressage dogma that mandates constant contact and requires 'resistance' from the rider. So, thirdly, it follows that at no time should a horse be 'on the bit' or, to phrase it physiologically, that the bit should be 'on the bone.' The very mention of the word 'bit' betrays the antiquity of the FEI rule.