

Can There Be A Baucherist Training Scale?

By David Donnelly, French Light Dressage

I have thought about this philosophically not only through my own journey on horseback but also because the Baucherist literature can seem for some, esoteric, boundless, and often difficult to summarize. Our culture desires order and systems to follow, to achieve goals and complete projects. And I think for many, the Baucherist approach seems "too different", and may seem confusing without concrete, delineated steps to follow in today's modern dressage programs.

What is interesting is that over my 30 years of training a wide variety of horses, reading and re-reading books because there was no internet, and embracing the unwritten concepts handed down, the Baucherist methods have become very clear and simple for me. The concepts of "position precedes action"— understanding "hand without leg, and leg without hand" – and the interpretation and execution of what I call the alternative French Training Scale (FTS), gives us a clear roadmap about the training decisions we make on day to day basis. I hope this article can provide some insight for those interested in exploring the French System.

Early in my equestrian education, I was first introduced to the concept of a French Training Scale in 1978. I was a blank slate then, without any knowledge of the different training systems. I had two dressage instructors in those early days, both were students of Master Nuno Oliveira. As we all know, Nuno followed the French principles and taught my instructors about a "French Training Scale." I presume Nuno probably developed these steps to help communicate and teach his interpretation of the French System and bring a sense of logic to the methods.

I was never taught by Nuno and make no claims except that my instructors presented this training scale as Nuno's teachings. It was handed down to me in my early education, and over the years has become one of the most important roadmaps in my equestrian experience. As a young student, I found that the French Training Scale's simple logic appealed to me. It was easy to interpret, and when it was explained by my instructors, the concepts made natural sense. Again, I have not found these steps laid out in literature in the same way the Germanic scale can be found, (I should mention that recently an attempt to find the actual origin of the German scale in literature has been difficult). The French Training Scale was never published by Baucher that I know of and it is likely that Nuno interpreted this intuitively.

For me, the training scales both German and French are meant to provide a broad spectrum roadmap, to evaluate what qualities in a horse's skill set we need to focus on in a horse's training progress. Ideally, we want to avoid mistakes as we move through the levels, and I believe that there is no one ultimate systematic approach to horse training. Having a strong skill-set from learning all methods allows a rider to apply the technique(s) that are best suited for the horse and the situation in that moment! In my experiences both teaching and training, I find myself continually utilizing this training scale because of it's simplicity, lack of conflicting signals for the horse, a minimization of rider physicality, and it's ultimate effectiveness.

Below is the French Training Scale as it was taught to me with some slight modifications, specifically step one where I have changed the word "Movement" to "Reactivity". Lets first begin with looking at the two training scales side by side to see just how different the approaches are to a horse's training progress. Keep in mind that they are both meant to accomplish the same results, harmony with our horse!

As you can see, the first quality we wish to accomplish in the French Training Scale is very different from the German scale; Free Forward Reactivity. This is to describe NOT how fast a horse is moving in any given gait but how quickly, easily, and completely he *responds* to the forward cues, whether it's under saddle or lunging. I often tell students, "Its not about how fast you are going. Its about how easily you could go fast if you wanted to!" Response time is the key here because we want our horse to be focused and ready to respond with the most gentle cues.

In my next article, we will talk in depth about step 1, and why this is the first fundamental step to establish. Please feel free to reach out with any questions and thank you for reading!

The French/Baucherist/Alternative Training Scale

1. Free Forward (Movement) Reactivity
2. Rhythm, Regularity, and Relaxation, the 3 R's
3. Obedience to the aids
4. Straightness
5. Impulsion
6. Collection

The Germanic Training Scale

1. Rhythm
2. Suppleness
3. Contact
4. Impulsion
5. Straightness
6. Collection