



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

This is the published version of a paper presented at *10th ISES, Denmark, August 6-9, 2014.*

Citation for the original published paper:

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, M., Lundgren, C. (2014)

Rider's perception of their communication with the horse.

In: Janne Winther Christensen, Jan Ladewig, Line Peerstrup Ahrendt & Jens Malmkvist (ed.), *Conference Proceedings 10th International Equitation Science Conference: 6-9 August 2014 at Vingsted Hotel and Conference Center, Denmark* (pp. 82-). Tjele, Danmark: Aarhus University
DCA report

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-26193>

Riders' perception of their communication with the horse

Mari Zetterqvist Blokhuis¹, Charlotte Lundgren²

¹MZ Equitation, Sweden; ²Linköping University, Sweden

Corresponding author: mari@mzequitation.se

This study is part of a project with the overall aim to improve riding education through a better understanding of the interplay between rider, riding instructor and horse. The rider influences the horse through a combination of weight, leg and rein aids together with the voice. The horse responds to these and the rider receives and interprets these responses. The current study aimed to describe and analyse the riders' perceptions and views on this communication. Fifteen experienced riders (all female) of intermediate level in dressage were recruited to participate in the study, most of them riding their own horses. The riders received private training from five experienced riding instructors/trainers. One training of each rider was video and audio recorded. Directly after the training, the riders watched 10 minutes from the video recording (stimulated recall) followed by a semi-structured in-depth interview. The riders were asked to give a general description of how they communicated with their horses. They were also asked to describe how they interpreted the horse's responses to the rider's signals and how they acted when the horse responded/or did not respond to their signals. The results showed that all riders were well aware of the importance of giving clear and precise signals to the horse and to remove a given signal (aid) as soon as the horse responds. Most riders (12 of 15) agreed that it is essential to check that the horse responds to the rider's basic signals in the beginning of each training session. The riders also pointed out that it is important to adjust the aids to the character of the horse and to the current physical and mental status of their horse. When the horses responded correctly on the rider's aids, the riders praised the horse either by using their voice or by petting the horse. When the horse did not respond as the rider wished, the riders generally repeated or strengthened their signals until they received a desired response. Interestingly, a major part of the riders (13 of 15) blamed themselves when the communication with the horse failed. In conclusion, the riders seemed to be aware of the practical application of the basic principles of learning theory, even if they were not familiar with the terminology. However, the riders also reported that in practice they perceived difficulties to control their own bodies and to adequately give and release their signals.

LP: The present study is the first part of a larger project in which we want to better understand the complex didactic process between rider, riding instructor and horse. We believe this will lead to improved performance and well-being for horses and riders. In this first step, we gained better knowledge about how riders perceive the communication with their horses.