

Great News for Serious Horseback Riders

Motivated and inspired horseback riders often fall into the perfectionism-trap. Whether you are into show-jumping, dressage or endurance riding, it is easy to become obsessed with perfection, always pushing yourself and your horse further and harder. Equestrian perfectionism often leads to micromanagement. Micromanagement refers to the need to be in control of every movement that your horse (or children, or employees, or students) makes. Ever heard of *descente de la main*? It is a classical riding term. I have heard many theories about the exact meaning of *descente de la main*, and several heated arguments too. *Descente de la main* is the exact opposite of micromanagement. How many riders (and instructors!) do you know who indulge in this manipulative pastime? It is often more obvious in their relationships with the people around them. Sometimes they are also referred to as control freaks. Micromanagement is disempowering and humiliating for your horse as well as for your husband, wife, child, parent, friend and co-workers. *Descente de la main* is about empowering your horse to take responsibility for his own carriage, without losing contact. When used correctly, *descente de la main* can work magic - but what is it? I think it will be best to hand over the microphone to a master of the art of classical riding, and a compatriot of mine, Francois de la Gueriniere: "There are two ways of giving with the hand. The first, which is the more common and most frequently used, is to lower the bridle-hand, as we have indicated. The second way is to take the reins in the right hand, behind the left hand, and while slightly raising the reins in the left hand, pass control to the right hand, and finally, giving up control with the left hand completely, lower the right hand onto the neck of the horse, and hence the horse finds itself completely free from contact. This manner of giving with the hand is called *descente de main*: it is also performed by taking the ends of the reins with the right hand, held at the height of the rider's head, the arm straight out and free; but you must be quite sure of the horse's mouth and its readiness to obey, in order to use this method. Care must be taken not to give with the hand or perform *descente de main* when the horse's weight is on its shoulders: the proper time to perform this movement is after a half-halt, and when you feel the horse coming back on its haunches, give with the hand or perform the *descente de main*. The proper moment, difficult to discern and seize, is one of the most subtle and useful aids of horsemanship; for the horse, bending its haunches just as contact is released, must necessarily remain light in hand, having no other support for the head." Francois de la Gueriniere "Ecole de Cavalerie" The good news is: You can let go. Relax. You really do not need to learn and master every riding skill immediately or perfectly. Choose the right moment and then relinquish control. Focus and put all your attention specifically on mastering one skill at a time. Give yourself and your horse a break if you feel overwhelmed. You need breaks and rewards if you want to remain productive. And so does your horse. It is necessary to refresh and recharge your own and your horse's batteries often. Aim for excellence, not perfection. And do the same in your relationships. In our interactions with the people around us, we often try to micro-manage their behaviour because we are scared for their safety. Maybe, however, we should practise *descente de la main* in our relationships too: drop your hands, let go, stop interfering, but do not lose contact. Allow every one around you to take responsibility for their own actions. Your stress levels will fall dramatically!

About the Author

Dr M de Clermont wrote "Ride with Supreme Self-Confidence" and edits the Equestrian Inspiration Newsletter about the mental skills needed to master the art of horsemanship. Subscribe here: <http://www.equestrian-life-coaching.com/to> receive a FREE Stress Less e-course

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