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# RIDE WITH LESS HAND, MORE FEEL

An American trainer learns from a German champion and devotee of the PRE horse.

By Kitson Jazyuka

**T**wo-time Olympic team gold medalist Martin Schaudt—known for his penchant for exotic horses—escaped the cold winter in his native Germany this year to train PRE (*Pura Raza Español*) stallions at Hampton Green Farm in Wellington, Florida. Schaudt explains that PRE horses are an especially good fit for the upper levels of dressage, not only for their excellent gaits and natural

collection but also because they are sensitive, electric horses. “With this kind of horse, you don’t need to ride with a lot of power. Instead, you can rely more on feeling,” he says. His message: Learn how the horse thinks, feels and moves. Then ride with your body—not your hands—for maximum effectiveness.

## How to Use Less Hand

Pati Pierucci is head trainer at Hampton Green Farm and rides their stallions. She says Schaudt helped her understand how to use her body better when riding. First, he pointed out that many people make the mistake of pulling on hot horses, but this only makes them more distressed. Instead, riders need to communicate more with their legs. “Slow down the pushing by closing your legs and stopping the forward movement with your core muscles, instead,” Schaudt advises. “For instance, when my leg is a little farther behind, that tells the horse to ‘please move sideways and a bit more in front.’”

Schaudt says that when you want to slow down an educated horse from collected trot to piaffe, closing your legs tells him to continue trotting. At the same time, sitting deeply asks him to slow down. If you want passage from collected trot, sit even deeper, using your weight to ask him to slow down and give even more pressure with your legs,



Martin Schaudt on Weltall VA, his 13-year-old Hanoverian gelding

asking for higher steps in the trot.

**Schaudt's self-test:** Transition from collected trot to walk. When you sit deep and go forward with your hands, does the horse slow down? "When this happens," says Schaudt, "It's the first step in the right direction."

**Exercise 1:** Schaudt told Pierucci that a good way to practice using less hand is by holding both reins in one hand. She was to sit deeply and more behind in the saddle and stop the forward motion with her abdominal muscles, while giving for-

ward with the reins. "Ask the horse to slow down by closing your legs, feeling the contact from your hip to your heel," Schaudt advises.

"Riding with one hand reminds me of how little I can get done unless I use my legs more," says Pierucci.

### **Ride From Back to Front**

Another way Schaudt explains how to ride the horse with less hand is to think of riding from the hind end forward.

"Many riders focus only on what they

see—the horse's head and neck," he says. "This is a mistake and probably the reason why so many riders work too hard with their hands. This gets back to the idea of closing your legs and slowing the motion with your seat. When you learn to collect a horse with your legs (even a hot horse), he slows down and relaxes."

**Exercise 2:** To ride from back to front, practice transitioning from walk to trot and back to walk again. "When you close your legs, the horse should

## Creating Modern Masterpieces With a Rare and Ancient Breed

Schaudt finds PRE horses just his style. "PRE horses have the potential to compete in dressage and win against the best warmbloods," he says. "With a well-bred, properly started PRE horse, you get the athleticism of a top-quality warmblood, plus better balance early on and the unique beauty of the breed."

Schaudt and Kimberly Van Kampen Boyer, owner of Hampton Green Farm, met last year when his interest in PRE and the breed's success in dressage led him to visit her farm in Wellington, Florida, and later her 200-acre breeding facility in Fruitport, Michigan. He bought two PRE stud colts for himself, one sired by Idilio and the other by Grandioso. This winter, he spent 10 days a month at Boyer's Florida facility, helping prepare the horses and rider Pati Pierucci for international-level competition. "I'm always interested in new horses and new things to work on," he says. "These horses have wonderful talent for collection in trot, piaffe, passage and canter work."

Schaudt and Pierucci's primary goal was to introduce Cosaco and Idilio to the Grand Prix level in Wellington. They were pleased to see the horses progress over the three months, from a green start to finishing the season with four second places, two third places and two fourth places, all in the open Grand Prix classes—firsts for the PRE in this highly competitive environment. Long-term plans depend on Schaudt's schedule with Weltall, his Grand Prix partner, as another Olympic year approaches.

Idilio, whose name means "affair" in Spanish, was Boyer's first PRE. She imported him from Spain as an investment horse, but shortly after he arrived, she changed her mind about sell-

ing the stallion. "He is the most poetic and expressive horse I've ever seen," she says. The highlight of his season was a second place in the Grand Prix at Dressage at Equestrian Estates in March.

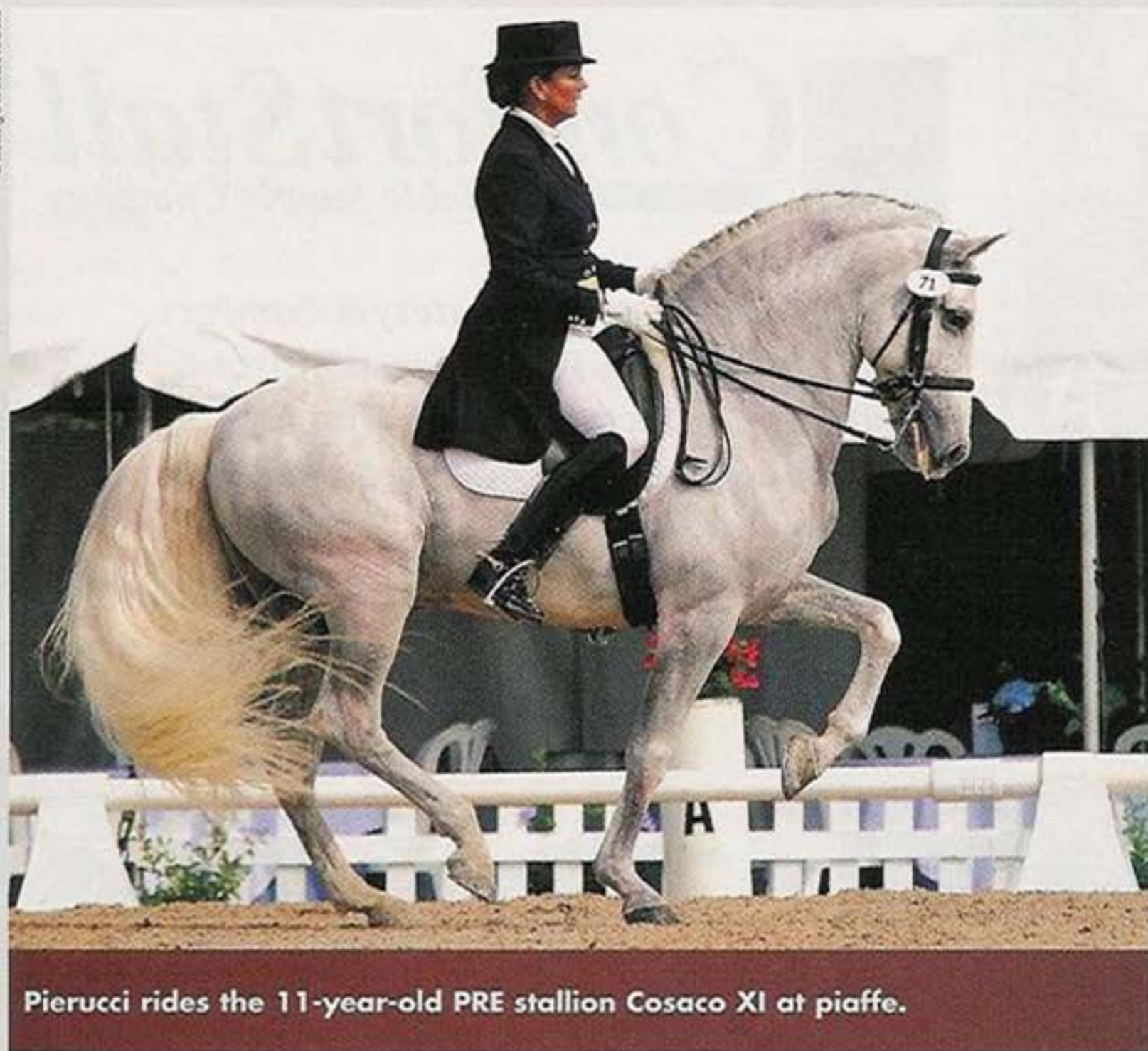
With bloodlines tracing back to the 16th century in Spain, the PRE were originally bred for war and later for bullfighting. Enthusiasts have been breeding them in the United States for more than 40 years. The dressage community started to notice when the Spanish Olympic team took the silver medal in 2006, impressing both judges and spectators with their beauty and the ease with which they executed piaffe and passage.

Boyer is a member of the board of directors for the Foundation for the Pure Spanish Horse and has also taken on the role of Spanish press liaison for the breed organization. She is often asked about the difference between a PRE and an Andalusian. "Like the term 'warmblood,'" she explains, "the term 'Andalusian' refers to a group of breeds. 'Andalusian' is the term for horses from the Iberian Peninsula—the PRE from Spain and the Lusitano from Portugal."

The Foundation offers programs, events and education specific to the PRE horse. For instance, it sponsored a clinic with Spanish Olympic medalist Rafael Soto, who traveled from Spain to Wellington to give a dressage clinic at Halycon Farm. The annual Fiesta Florida—Nov. 8–11 in Ocala—is a breed show for the PRE horse designed to be just like the PRE shows in Spain, featuring a conformation segment, a dressage element, seminars and exhibitions. For more information on the Foundation's ongoing activities, go to the Web site [prehorse.org](http://prehorse.org).



**Kimberly Van Kampen Boyer and her husband, Frederic Boyer**



Pierucci rides the 11-year-old PRE stallion Cosaco XI at piaffe.

come up and underneath more from behind," Schaudt says. "Your contact should be light. Give with your hands during the transitions, being careful not to throw away the reins. Maintain contact and have light forearms. You have contact but you are not holding the horse's head up."

### Use Your Weight While Bending

Schaudt says dressage riders can practice using their hands less while bending and turning. "I often see riders pulling their horses in the direction they want to go but leaning the opposite direction. This gives the horse mixed messages. A horse should always follow the weight of your body."

**Exercise 3:** To bend and turn the horse, rely more on your weight than on your hands. For instance, if you want to bend to the right, your inside leg should be a bit more forward but on. Close your legs, putting more weight on your right

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seat bone. At the same time, tighten your core muscles so the horse doesn't increase his forward movement but responds to the directional aid given by your weight. Hands keep contact with the mouth but ask nothing. The inside rein moves with the horse's mouth as the circumference of your circle shortens, the horse bends or moves right.

### Ride with Your Body

Schaudt believes that using your seat more effectively starts with developing a feel for the horse moving under you and noticing how your seat bones and weight affect him. Pierucci says, "Riding more with my body has dramatically increased my ability to give an effective aid—most importantly with my seat."


**Exercise 4:** To ride more with your body, take your feet out of the stirrups and imagine your seat bones are plugs going into an outlet, with your legs as the prongs. If you push one seat bone

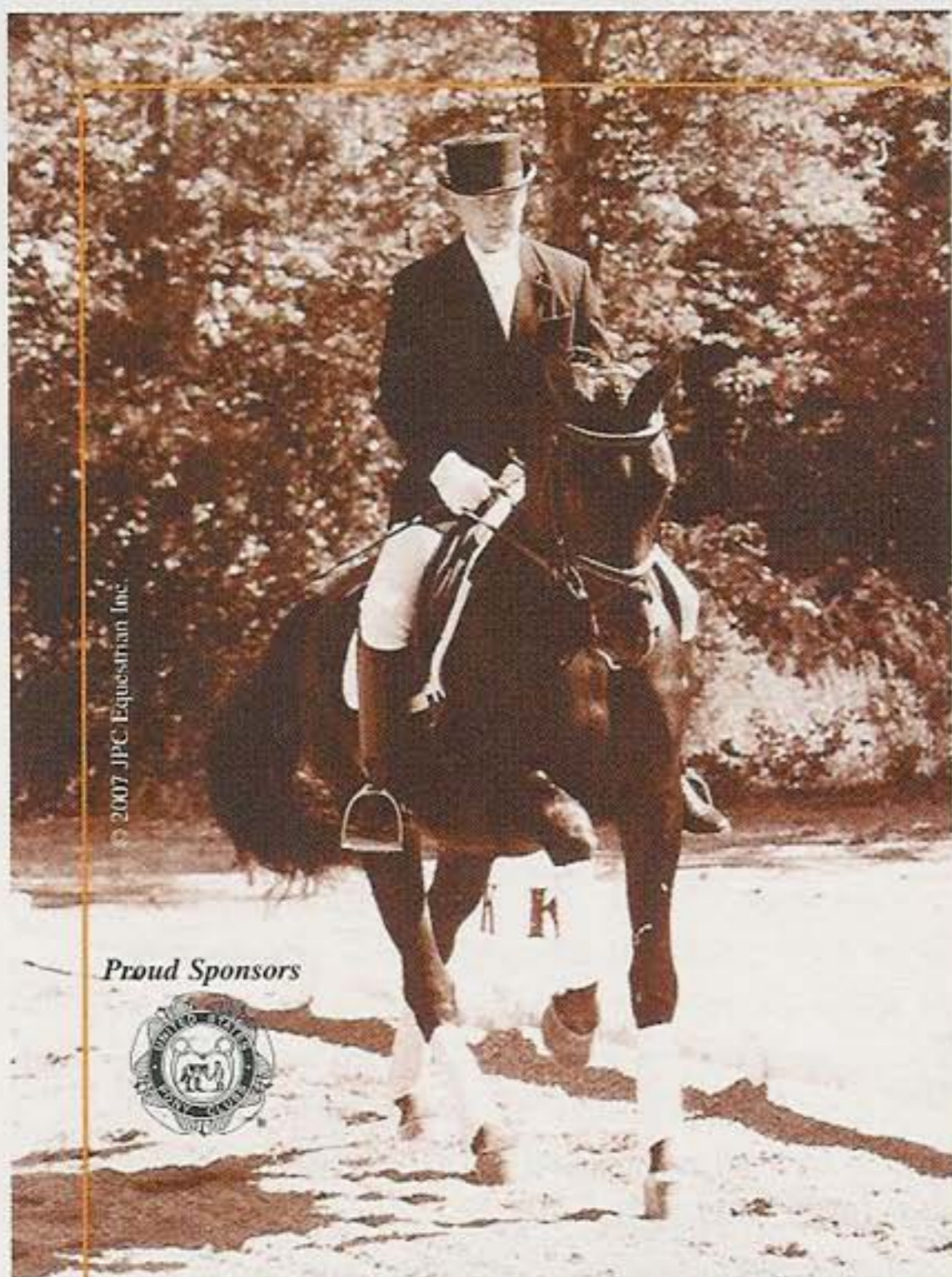
against the spine of the horse, he should move away from the pressure sideways or at least cross his hind leg toward the midline of his stomach.

### So, What Are the Hands For?

The rider's hands, says Schaudt, guide the momentum and direction established by the seat. The hands also use the whip. This is another area where improved understanding of how your horse moves can improve your aids. The whip can only help create activity from behind if you touch the horse at the correct time. Schaudt says if you are trotting and carrying the whip on the right side, tap the horse with it when the inside hind lifts off the ground." In canter, when the inside hind leaves the ground, touch him with the whip on the same side. This gives the horse time to lift his leg higher. "When the foot is on the ground and I touch him with the whip, the energy and the opportunity is

lost. The horse has no chance to show the right reaction," he says. "But if the leg is already lifting up, you can capture that energy and increase the activity. In the half pass, I touch him with the whip as the outside hind is coming up. This means I'm tapping the horse just as he's pushing off and getting ready to come up."

"Riding with less hand and more leg is very basic," says Pierucci, "but it is now the basis of my riding, whether I'm hacking out bareback or practicing a Grand Prix test. I've learned that when Martin asks me to move Idilio's shoulders to the right, for example, he means I should do that by relying more on my weight. I focus on closing my lower leg and giving with my hands at every stride. I've learned from Martin to increase the expectation of what I can do," she says. "He provides the 'glue' that holds together all of the pieces I have learned over the years." 



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