

## Christian Carde Clinic in Finland: "Good Riding is Good Riding"

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[French Equitation](#)

Colonel Christian Carde left no doubt that to him there is no equitation restricted tonationalistic boundaries. There is no German, Dutch nor French way of riding, except simply sticking to proven classical principles. "Good riding is good riding," concluded Carde at the seminar he gave at the Ruukki Agricultural Institute near Oulu in Finland on 29 September - 1 October 2014.

A regular clinician in different parts of this Scandinavian country for more than a decade, Cadre Noir's former chief rider Carde attracted a large audience of Finnish professionals who came to one of the country's six official schools, where aficionados can learn one of the equine professions.

Partly funded by the Finnish National Board of Education, the seminar included a two-day-clinic as well as a day of lectures with practical demos under the banner of "riding and training properly."

### Getting the Right Contact

"The quality of the contact is the focal point of all schooling because it has such a great impact on everything else," Carde stressed repetitiously during the two-day-clinic that preceded the lecture day in the west of Finland. Six riders with eight horses differing between novice- and PSG-level took part.



Carde with Quite Like a Joy



Christian Carde and the organizers of the three-day seminar at the Ruukki Agricultural Institute near Oulu in Finland  
Photo © Ulla Alanko

Maybe surprising to some not yet familiar with the Frenchman's way of training is that not the refinement of certain dressage movements was the centre of attention, but the improvement of the horses' contact, suppleness and balance leading to a subsequent improvement of the degree of collection which in the end enables the horse to execute the movements with more ease. True to his approach Carde was not timid to work advanced horses on the basics like an elastic steady contact. The work showed with a few horses, among them the 11-

year-old Finnish warmblood mare Quite Like a Joy (by Quite Easy x Bartok) who is currently schooled at M-level. Though this grand daughter of Quidam de Revel (SF) moves with beautiful suppleness and apparently in a nice frame, "she has an extremely difficult mouth which is easily restless for whatever reason," her rider confessed. Professional Anna Kilpeläinen has been

training the horse for years for a client of hers and still rides the horse without any noseband. She thinks "it is not about shutting her mouth, because the resistance is the problem, not the restlessness that results from it. Fixing the resistance has nothing to do with shutting her mouth. The mare requires an absolute steady and quiet contact and the aim was to get that before practicing any movements."

Carde first worked the horse from the ground by gently fixing the reins on the mare in the halt and simply waiting for the horse to take the contact. He only released the reins when he could feel that the horse truly accepted the contact without avoidance or resistance. "The horse not only has to be in a soft and steady contact, but has to follow the hands in any direction," Carde remarked while putting his words into practice, moving Quite Like a Joy's neck forwards-downwards, upwards and sideways while she visibly kept an even contact all the time. He then asked her rider take the



Carde works Anna Kilpeläinen and Quite Like a Joy on the volte

reins in one hand and fix it at the horse's neck. Only by keeping the horse active behind and the rider playing with her fingers she was able to get the horse neck round and in the desired frame. "Fixing one or both hands like that helps the rider to follow very precisely the horse's movements without stiffening. A contact can only be elastic and steady if the rider himself is like that." The horse then was put on a small circle with the rider having both hands at the reins and the withers.

For the spectators it was interesting to see that with this method the horse not only became very quiet, soft and absolutely steady in the contact, but also the balance improved while executing transitions from halt to walk and trot. "With that method, call it a trick or not, you manage to keep your hands still and achieve a steady contact and this can be useful for riders of all levels," Carde commented on what is not commonly seen.



Ulla Seuranen demonstrating Carde's demi-arret (half halt) on Herz Jewel

It was also the focal point of the schooling sessions with quite well known Finnish trainer Ulla Seuranen. Competing successfully up to S- level, Ulla brought her confirmed PSG horse Spinners Image (British warmblood by Rabinowitz x Java Tiger xx) as well as her upcoming Oldenburger Herz Jewel (by Just Perfect x Kleostro/Trak.). For Seuranen the clinic meant not only working on Spinners Image's piaffe and passage work, but also adopting the ways to handle the reins and experience the effects on her horses:

"The new way to use the reins is not easy to adopt, but if you understand the

principle it also something which is easily understandable for the horse. When the hand is working towards the horse's mouth, it is possible to keep a slight tension in the reins which the horse does not resist to, but accepts willingly. So precisely following the movement of the horse's mouth is the most important thing, but also the most difficult." Ulla felt that what she learned in the clinic will not only help with her own riding, but in particular with her teaching as "it is easy to say to the students 'don't pull'. Colonel Carde now has given me the means to help my students what to do."

#### No Lightness Without Activity

Even though working on the quality of every horse's contact in one way or the other, onlookers soon realized that Carde does not at all belong to the sort of trainers who make the contact the one and only topic. He very much sees it inseparable from the horse's activity and balance. The former French national coach again and again reminded riders that the first thing needed is activity. "Activity does not

Seuranen on Spinners Image

mean to make the horse quicker, but to move with more energy from behind, manifesting in a freer gait. It is also a state of mind of the horse, that it is always willing to take up the activity at any time and keep it." The activity from behind has to be channeled by the steady and feeling contact in front, bringing the horse into balance. For that it is necessary not to confuse activity with speed, which is a common mistake in equitation. Carde elaborated that speed kills the balance and this leads to contact problems and tension.



The correlation between it could clearly be seen when Mintti Rautioaho, one of the Ruukki School of Equitation's instructors, rode the second of her two horses in the clinic, the strikingly colored Spanish cremello Rociero. The 7-year-old gelding began the lesson with balance problems, resulting in hurried steps and not using his hind legs properly, which made him unsteady and not too happy in the contact. Carde hopped on the compact horse and demonstrated how to regain the balance by bringing Rociero into a natural frame with the neck elevated. Then he lowered his hands and fixed them at the horse's withers to encourage the horse to take a steady contact while he maintained a proper activity from behind. Within a few moments the spectators saw a different horse, moving well cadenced, straight and with a quiet mouth. It impressively demonstrated the importance of keeping the essentials like activity, steady contact and straightness at all times. Without them the horse's balance suffers and without balance there is no collection.



Mintti Rautioaho on Rociero

Rautioaho admitted that "not mixing up speed with activity is something which I had to learn and which I am still doing. The bad consequences when you do can be felt immediately; to get the right feeling for the right amount of activity. It helps me a lot when Colonel Carde corrects the cadence while I ride and I save this feeling for my riding at home. It is a feeling of a slow cadenced movement executed with upwards energy causing the horse to carry himself." A feeling she could well demonstrate on her second horse in the clinic Fighting Fierce, who

was the former Northern Finland Young Horse Dressage Champion as a 6-year old. This harmoniously built Hanoverian (by Fighting Fit x Goodwill) was injured for more than a year and is only been in training again since the beginning of 2014. Although appearing more a 6-year old than the 8 years of age he is the gelding gave glimpses of what can be expected in future.

The work focused on getting Fighting Fierce more active. Carde reminded Mintti to rebalance the horse regularly by using a short upwards-fowards movement of the hands, effecting the corners of the lips, to elevate the horse's neck-head position and thereby bring it in a better balance by improving the lightness of the forehand and as a consequence allow for better collection. The horse slowed down the speed in favour of more elevated, active steps which were supple and light footed. It could be clearly seen that this sometimes heavily misunderstood method is a useful tool if one keeps the activity after the horse has slowed down. It brought the horse into better balance, so he could show the first promising half steps that were asked at the end of the session. One could truly see that the basics had been set right as Fighting Fierce took weight behind in balance.

Rautioaho stressed that even though her Hanoverian is a talented horse "I could never afford an expensive or ready trained horses. That's why Carde's system is very important to me; it really enables every horse to become collected and do more demanding movements and at the same time retains the horse's joy in work. For me the decisive factor within this system is to get the right feeling for

Mintti Rautioaho on Fighting Fierce

activity, balance and submission because this can be applied on every movement. It is a kind of tool to train my horses to become more supple and also stronger mentally.”

#### Up and Down

While Carde paid a lot of attention getting the horses working in the correct frame and attitude, he made all attendants well aware that it is very important to alternate regularly between working in

the desired elevation and a less strenuous stretching position. “This alternation has to be frequent throughout a training session. The more we collect a horse, the more we have to stretch it afterwards. It is a kind of reward, but more so it prevents the horse from getting tired and stiff, a condition which does not allow good collection and might cause resistances,” he pointed out, adding with a twinkle in his eye, “some people think I am against “long and low”, but it is not the case at all.”

The importance of a correct contact in which the horse has to learn to trust the rider's hand and follow it anywhere became obvious.



Niina Kirjorinne on Capital

How well this system works was shown by young Niina Kirjorinne and her massive Tori gelding Capital (Estonian warmblood by Casanova x Delfiin). This Cor de la Bryère grandson's development has been staggering in the past two years since they began clinicing with Carde. Nobody would believe the transformation this horse went through. “When I bought Capital two years ago as a 9-year old he was already an advanced horse, but with a very heavy contact and simply no balance. When we started working with the Colonel my horse had to learn

everything from scratch again, beginning with the contact,” Kirjorinne admitted.

In this clinic Capital showed a much improved contact and balance, allowing him to work in the more collected movements. It was still very important to grant the horse frequent breaks in between work up to very collected movements like piaffe and passage not tire him out nor risking resistances and tension. Niina pointed out that the biggest success for her is that “now my horse is showing some signs that he is ready to really work with me because he likes it, not just because he needs to. He is more calm in his mind and even a little bit happy. Calmness is often totally forgotten when training horses and this is a very important thing to preserve in training all the time.” Calmness was something which dominated both training days well reflected in the horse's relaxed manner to work and to cooperate without stress or tension

#### Dressage is about the Quality of Collection and Partnership

Renowned clinicians all over the world tend to put the difficult movements as the pivotal point for the clinics, and easily forget that dressage is not about the demanding movements. There are few clinicians who make the basics the foundation of each lesson. For Carde it's all about the basics such as regaining the natural balance of horse in a logical way so it develops into carrying power behind, free loading the shoulders in front and becoming supple through gymnastic exercises. Carde's clinic exactly recollected that dressage is about the quality of collection and the quality of a partnership between horse and rider.



Colonel Christian Carde

Calmness and happiness of a horse in work are essential at any time, and they do not fall into a rider's lap automatically. “Horses have good-will and always do what we ask them, if you ask

them the right way. Firstly you must exactly ask your question and secondly you need a method to make the horse understand," Carde explained. "If the horse still does not respond to you, it is simply because it is not capable of doing it or it hasn't understood you, not once because of ill will. Never forgot that because of an inability or because of misunderstandings you will get a bad exercise. And every bad try is not only useless, but also harmful to your horse," said Carde about never troubleshooting the horse when something goes wrong. "If you always remember this, you will take great benefit during your whole career as a horseman or horsewoman."

#### Principles of Good Equitation

The last day of the seminar was planned to take place in the auditorium of the school, but needed to be relocated into the indoor arena due to the large number of auditors, mostly riding instructors and future riding instructors. Carde had prepared power point presentations which were underlined by giving demonstrations with horses of the school.



Organizer Anna Kilpeläinen prepares another horse for Carde's in-hand demonstrations

Even though the lectures contained many practical aspects, Carde also gave insight in his "philosophy" of "Riding and training horses properly" as he called the presentation. By showing a beautiful photo of a renowned German Grand Prix rider riding her younger horse in a pleasant frame, Carde explained the term "muscular harmony" which should be the goal through systematic and correct training. "Muscular harmony means that horse and rider are both in total harmony as a result of both being in balance and thereby moving in a supple way without any resistance from the muscles." To

achieve this condition all riders are striving for, one needs to achieve a quadruple balance. "Balance means mental as well as physical balance. One cannot happen without the other. Horse and rider are equally complementary as those are. So the rider needs to achieve mental and physical balance and he is responsible for the horse's. Only when both kinds of balance are existent in both partners, we reach the desired state of harmony," Carde explained.

Christian immediately stressed the importance of always respecting the mental well-being of the horse when working with him; everything has to be done with calm and by being clear to the horse. "You are never allowed to attempt something if your horse is not calm. If it gets tense for whatever reason, stop and first restore his calm before you go on."

The former Olympian highlighted the absolute need of the rider to respect his horse's physical limits and not push beyond it. Within these limits one has to follow the pedagogical principle to advance from the known to the unknown to make oneself understood. The smallest progress has to be rewarded generously. To keep the horse calm and attentive Carde strongly recommended to break a working sessions into many portions of short periods of work alternating with frequent rest. "Mental balance, which I simply call calmness, is one component to achieve physical balance. The others are getting the horse active at all times and achieve straightness. Only when the horse is calm and active it is available for the rider," he stated.



Carde amongst the large audience that gathered for this 3-day seminar in Finland

Carde told the rather young audience that during his riding career, which spans about 60 years, he tried to find an order of importance regarding all aspects when schooling a horse. It became clear that he considered the contact as the most important, because it has a great impact on every other aspect. He pointed out that good contact first requires a good seat with supple hips and shoulders, elastic elbows and a tactful play of the fingers. A rider must be able to follow his horse's movements smoothly at all times.



circle and taking care it moves forwards with enough activity, but not hastily: "Lift the inside rein to make the horse yield. The moment it does, you yield as well, guide the horse's ears above the mouth and lower the hand again. The same moment you have to increase the activity. Take care you do not resist more with your hand than the horse does, because then you cause a contradiction to which the horse's mouth will become resistant."

To establish a good contact and teach everything new to the horse, the slow gait of walk should be extensively used. Most of the movements are easiest to execute and learn at walk. If they are confirmed at walk, the rider can advance to trot and canter.

Carde reminded his auditors that only a well structured working session in which the horse faces a variety of movements, an alternation of frames and is allowed to take a breather regularly leads to a harmonious working relationship and progress in learning.

"Act precisely and progressively, be patient and persistent and don't forget to pat," said the true horseman who gave the entire audience valuable tools to work with.

Article by Anna Kilpeläinen, edited by Silke Rottermann

Photos courtesy Auli Säynjäkangas, Ulla Alanko, Tero Törmänen, [Johanna Havia](#)



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