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# FLYING CHANGES

magazine for northwest  
sporthorse enthusiasts

## Harriet Hauser:

*Modesty & Mastery in the Training of Dressage*

**Lauren Davis Baker**

Every journey is better on horseback. This is a good thing, given the long and difficult journey that every dressage trainer must accept as the destiny of her profession. The steep and rocky road to good dressage will inevitably test one's soul, and it is a trainer's abiding love for the horses that permits her to survive and, if she's got enough talent and heart, enables her to thrive. Fortunately, Harriet Hauser was blessed with sufficient horse-love to fill several hearts, and she will be the first to tell you that her love of horses is what has enabled her to survive and thrive as a trainer and teacher of dressage.

If you ask Harriet when she first wanted to have a horse, she will say, "From the moment I was conceived." This was fortunate, because Harriet's family was not "horsed," either by passion or pocketbook. It was not until Harriet was 10 years old that she was able to take her first riding lessons—a one-month, four-lesson package from grouchy old Colonel Farr, who taught at the Columbia Hunt Club behind the old Jantzen Beach amusement park. Thrilled as she was to finally start riding, Harriet was only able to take lessons for a couple of years before her advancing school demands and retreating finances forced her to abstain from her equine passion for the next 14 years.



Harriet at High Hopes Farm.

Then, at the age of 26, Harriet could stand it no longer. She said to herself, "Hey! I'm a grown up! I can do anything I want! And what I want is to take riding lessons!" So she went to the barn that eventually became Columbia Stables and started taking lessons with Eva Fellner, who just happened to be teaching dressage. Not that Harriet started out with any lofty ambitions to be a dressage rider. As she wryly observes, "If Eva had been teaching barrel racing, that's probably what I'd be doing now." Harriet Hauser was no ambitious dressage queen. She just loved horses, and she loved to ride. Two years after she began riding with Eva, Harriet plopped down \$500 for her first horse, a saddlebred/thoroughbred cross named Ben. Now she was in it for good and all.

For some people, the onset of horse ownership heralds the decline of their passion for horses. Not Harriet. Within ten years, she had not only become a proficient dressage rider, she had taken over the management of Columbia Stables...a professional cataclysm that required Harriet to start giving riding lessons to the Columbia students. Harriet's beginning as a professional horsewoman was, once again, anything but ambitious. If you ask Harriet when she first started working as a dressage trainer, she will say, "Well, I started giving riding lessons in 1988, but I didn't really consider myself to be a dressage trainer until many years later."

Today, Harriet is willing to call herself a dressage trainer, which is fortunate, because everyone who knows her will attest that her career has been distinguished as much by her bulletproof modesty as by her personal popularity and professional success. For eleven years at Columbia Stables in Portland, and for the following nine years at High Hopes Farm in Ridgefield, Washington, Harriet has offered to her students and their horses the best of what she knows and loves about dressage. When asked to describe her training approach, she slowly replies, "Well, I value calmness above all, and with that, a willingness to take however much time it takes, even if it means postponing your own agenda for the training. And then you must convince your horse, with equal amounts of firmness and kindness, that s/he can move forward without restriction."

When asked to describe her priorities in working with dressage riders, Harriet will emphasize again that "a dressage teacher must be calm and positive. I focus on the points of progress in



Harriet aboard Buranka in 2002.

the rider and horse, in order to build their confidence and competence, individually and as a team. Beyond that, I am always looking for new ways to describe what I've learned, because an image that works for me may not work for a given student. In that sense, I often find that my students are my best teachers." In fact, it is one of Harriet's fundamental principles that, in order to excel in the training of horses and the teaching of riders, one has to be a perpetual student oneself, and she has lived and worked by that principle. She is always quick to express her gratitude for the training that she has received from a variety of excellent teachers, including Dietrich vonHopffgarten, Mary Judkins, Peter DeCosemo, Bettina Drummond, and Pierre Cousyn. And after Harriet recites this list, she will hasten to add the list of horses from whom, she emphasizes, she has learned her most important lessons – "compassion, patience, and kindness."



Harriet Hauser (10 y.o.) & Barbara Bertinchamps (9 y.o.) with Lightning—a camp fixture since 1958. Bob Smith Photo

All the wisdom that Harriet accumulated from her human trainers and equine teachers was finally united into a single training approach in 2002, when the Austrian trainer Nicola Stauder joined the High Hopes clinic program. Eventually, Nicola introduced Harriet and her students to the work of Dr. Gerd Heuschmann, author of the 2007 book *Tug of War: Classical versus "Modern" Dressage*. Harriet quickly agreed with Nicola that their approach was deeply congruent with that of Dr. Heuschmann, a German veterinarian and dressage trainer whose work with crippled dressage horses had sent him on a campaign to eliminate from international dressage the training techniques that he had found to be abusive and harmful to horses. Harriet's enthusiasm for the Heuschmann approach led Nicola to invite her to Bozeman, Montana in April 2008, where Harriet was to ride in the first Heuschmann symposium held in the United States.

The four-day symposium, which included one day of lecture and three days of clinic-riding by eight invited riders, drew a crowd of nearly 100 paying auditors from around the country. It was an arduous undertaking for Harriet to participate in this event, because she and her mount (a student's 12-year-old Friesian gelding) had to cross the Rockies during a late winter of deep snow. However, the reward was well worth the effort. Not only did Harriet receive from Dr. Heuschmann his heartfelt confirmation that she had successfully integrated

his training approach into hers, but she was also regaled with compliments from him and his auditors about the subtlety of her aids, the accuracy of her timing, and the overall joy with which she and her horse worked in harmony.

As this point, Harriet is the local trainer with the most immediate experience of Dr. Heuschman's training. But Harriet hopes, for the sake of all dressage horses, that the Heuschmann approach will become the new standard of dressage training in the world. "What I love most about Gerd's work," she explains, "is his emphasis on 1) releasing negative tension in the horse and rider, 2) improving one's willingness to release the horse out and down when necessary, 3) developing one's ability to feel when the horse has enough activity behind and relaxation in the back to be able to work in an "up" frame, and 4) the absolute need for lots of time to develop the suppleness and strength necessary for a healthy dressage horse."



Ben, Harriet's 1st horse, at the Canby Horse Show, May 1980.



With Anton at Columbia Stables, 1984.



Harriet & Anton at Lake Oswego in 1987.



A birthday ride at Red's Riding Academy in Portland.



In 1976 Harriet worked as an usher at the Pacific International Livestock Exposition in Portland.

Those who know Harriet will quickly recognize that the Heuschmann approach supports her deepest feelings about dressage: "I don't like what's being done to horses to achieve success in the competitive dressage arena. What I love most about dressage is the partnership that you develop with your horses when you're willing to listen to what they have to tell you." And when we who love our horses find it hard to hear what they are telling us, people like Gerd Heuschmann and Harriet Hauser can help us hear them.

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