

BOOK REVIEW

MOVEMENT, MUSCLES, MASSAGE

By Kirsty Davis

Graphics by Martin Young

Foreword by Sylvia Stanier LVO

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Reviewed by Susan McBane

THE most obvious thing about this book at first sight is its format – an A3-sized flip chart presentation with an eye-catching representation of a galloping horse, showing some of the muscles in use at that gait. The author, an equine sports massage therapist, has produced *Movement, Muscles, Massage* from graphics developed for the Equine Sports Massage Association's stand at Badminton Horse Trials in May 2004 as 'a visual aid to demonstrate and succinctly portray effects of various activities on the muscular system of the horse'.

Today, most conscientious riders will make at least a basic study of how the horse moves. The terminology used in the clear explanatory text accompanying the graphics should not be beyond the understanding of such readers. The graphics are very clear, each type of tissue having a colour – muscles in red, bone in green and so on - and depict only the main muscles used in each movement. They bring home unmistakably the stress under which horses and their riders operate in all performance disciplines, competitive and otherwise.

Not only the muscles are discussed, usually of both horse and rider or driver, but also their associated bones and other soft tissues which go to make up the living machine of the horse in motion. The illustrations are clearly labelled, indicating the body parts; then there are blocks of explanatory text, just enough in each case to give understanding without information overload.

As an example, in 'The Horse Pulling in Dressage' – the fact that the author felt it appropriate to include this shows how common it is – some of the text reads: 'As this graphic demonstrates, the detrimental effects of a heavy and fixed contact are not exclusive to the galloping horse. Many dressage riders suffer from tension in the upper body and neck muscles. Tension in the jaw from clenching the teeth is also a common problem and can cause headaches.' The accompanying graphic shows clearly the muscles of the horse which are braced against the flexion of the poll and the rider's strong contact, and the muscles of the rider braced against this contact. It makes you shudder.

The author states in her enlightening Preface that she has 'tried to bring to life what lays beneath the skin so that a fire of enthusiasm can be ignited among the many that want to learn about how they themselves influence the horse and want to have a deeper understanding about how the horse moves'. In her Foreword, Sylvia Stanier says that she wishes that she had had access years ago to the knowledge contained in this book.

My own hope is that the book is adequately publicised by all equestrian magazines and by the magazines published by the different equestrian sporting bodies and administrative associations, because it will certainly be an eye-opener to very many people. It would be a most valuable addition to the required reading lists for examinations and a valuable aid to private study for the concerned rider who wants to do her, or his, best for their horse.