

Why don't we see **MORE** **BOYS** *riding dressage* ?

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A delicate subject...
(no pun intended)

It's always interesting to take a few moments when I'm working at a horse show to check out the competition. I mean the real competition- the riders who have trained long and hard and are now showing off their skills in the ring. Especially in dressage shows, but also at the lower level hunter/jumper shows – it is almost painfully obvious how few boys there are riding and competing!

It's almost cliché – girls and their horses – but it's really sad that (especially in North America it seems) hardly any boys are entering the sport. Most of the top competitors who are male and riding dressage got their basic training in Europe: Steffen Peters, Guenter Seidel, Tom Dvorak to name a few.

Riding is just not a 'generally accepted politically correct sport' for boys in North America it seems.

I grew up in Germany and I grew up on horseback. Almost all of my friends rode – and we started off together in pony camp. I also indulged in another 'girly' sport: ice dancing with my sister as my partner. (I am so glad that I had girls, because I would not have been a good 'boy dad' – I knew nothing of the classic North American sports when I came over; football, baseball, hockey... only soccer would have probably been an option!) I also thought I knew how to skate when I was invited for a couple of pick-up hockey games with 'older' neighbours (they were in their late 30s while I was early 20s). What I didn't realize is that Canadian males are born with hockey skates on their feet; while I was a pretty good ice dancer they were the ones skating circles around me (I call them 'pirouettes').

But let's examine the question a little closer concerning why boys specifically generally don't ride. Beyond the 'peer pressure' issue of it not necessarily being a 'macho' sport, perhaps there are other reasons at play; issues that have to do with my favorite subject: saddle fit!

The Medical Explanation

I conferred with my friend Dr. James Warson (author of "the Rider's pain-free back" and one of the only certified equestrian medical professionals in the industry – besides also being a Comanche warrior! – this man is seriously cool!). This is what he told me, and what I actually included in a chapter in my book "Suffering in Silence: The Saddle Fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses". (3rd edition being released in August in paperback with new photos and additional chapters!)

"A young man's testicles lie between his pelvis and the saddle. There are three muscular components in the testicles; one in the wall of the scrotum, one in the vas deferens (connecting the



testes with the urethra) and the cremaster (responsible for the 'tightening of the balls' or pulling the testicles back up into the body cavity in a protective measure). This last muscle doesn't function fully before puberty – which means that a young boy actually feels his testicles being 'squished' when riding because they cannot be retracted."

This becomes a real issue during trot or canter, which may explain why young boys prefer to do their riding in a walk or posting trot. This is of course embarrassing to discuss with both your riding instructor and your mother which is probably why boys would rather pursue other sports. Our patented 'crotch comfort' Adap-Tree® which was originally developed for women obviously works for males in this area and for this purpose as well. But it goes even further...

If the pressure from the saddle is too great on the sensitive area between the testicles and the anus (the area called the perineum) it can actually hinder blood flow through the artery that leads into the penis. This could eventually cause erectile issues all the way to complete impotence if the blood flow stops totally. The recognition of this potential problem actually led to the development of the male friendly military McClellan saddle, reducing the risk of impotence for men whose careers depended on life in the saddle. This is one of those missing 'lost nuggets of wisdom' which absolutely should be reintegrated into general saddle design.

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