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GEORGE

BACK TO BASICS, A Look Inside a Clinic from the Founding Father of Hunter Seat Equitation

MORRIS

Quotes from George Morris
Photos by Marc Patoile

George Morris conquered a childhood fear of horses to become a world-renowned hunter and jumper instructor, and is considered to be one of the most influential trainers in the history of equestrian sports. A rider with a long list of impressive wins, Morris is also a well-known author. His first book "Hunter Seat Equitation," is considered the "bible" among hunter/jumper riders. The Chronicle of the Horse named Morris one of the 50 Most Influential Horsemen of the 20th Century.

George's clinics are not only packed solid with highly sophisticated instruction, they are also highly entertaining. Mr. Morris has a wicked sense of humor and pity to the noisy infant in the stands, or the rider who is not paying 110% attention. As always, George lets his rider know when he's not happy. "If your horse lacks impulsion, cluck and use your spur," he bellows at one rider. "Don't pump. You look like an ape in labor on the top limb of a tree."

The following quotes and photos are from the Morris clinic at Crooked Willow Farms.



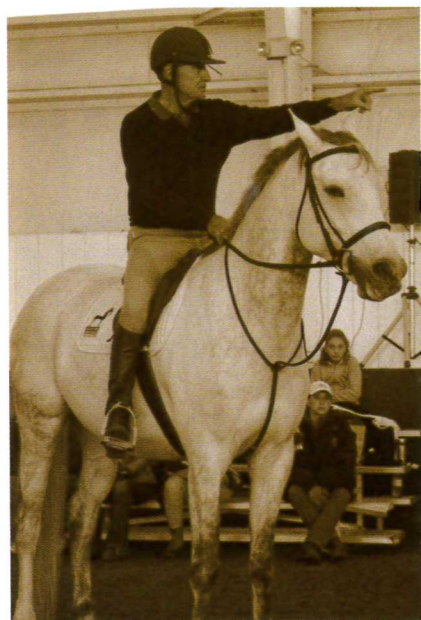
If your heels are lower than your toes, it gives you the appropriate grip on the horse.



The horse's neck and body are bent the same, not his neck bending over more than his body.



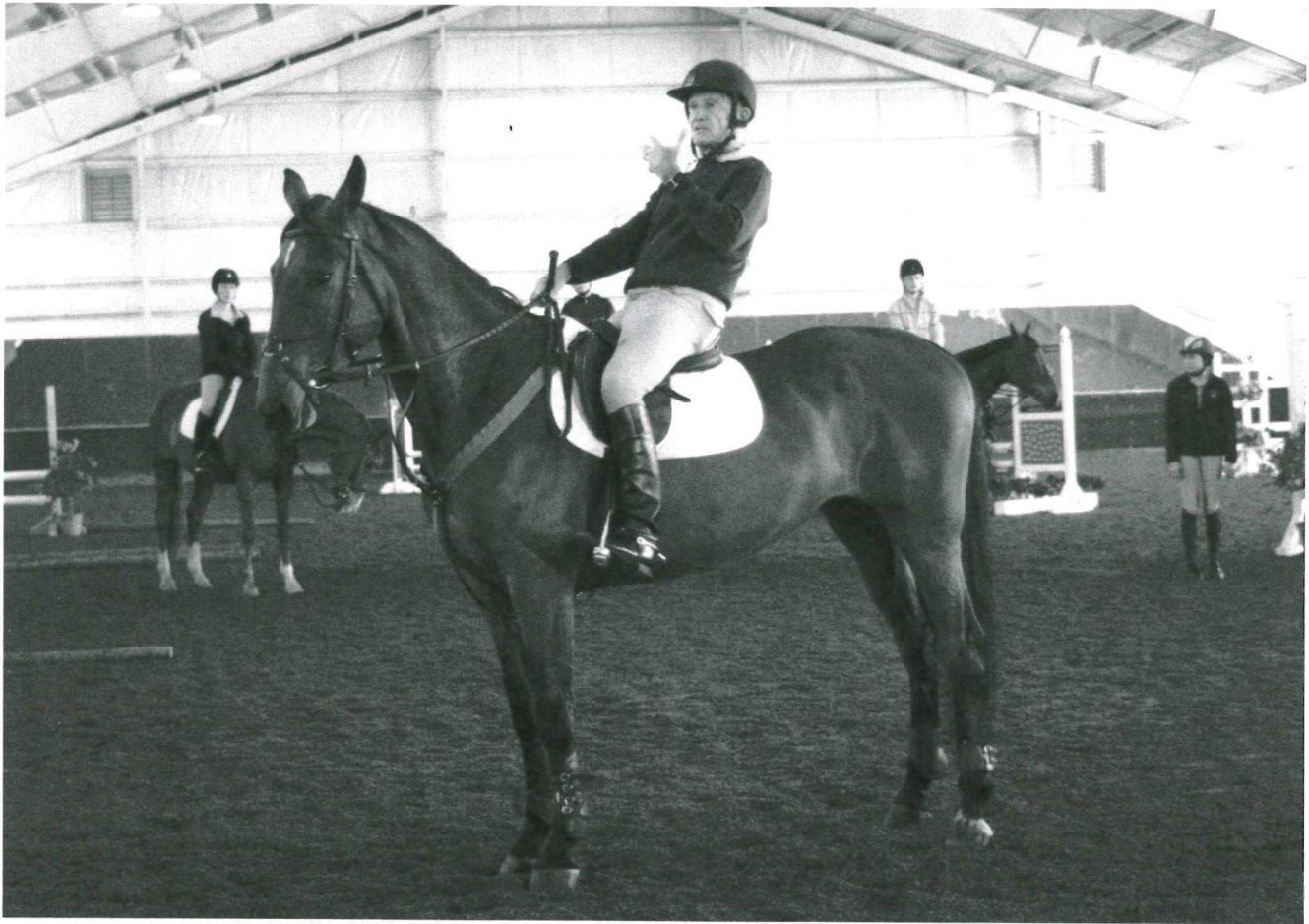
These people are impossible to teach because they do not listen well. You have to listen, listen. [An hour later...] I am very happy with this group. This group looks very, very good today.



This is a first. Maybe I am getting old, but I give up. I give up. You aren't paying attention. [Moments later...] Good, now you are paying attention.



No, no, not the chicken way out. Take that [line] in five strides, not six.



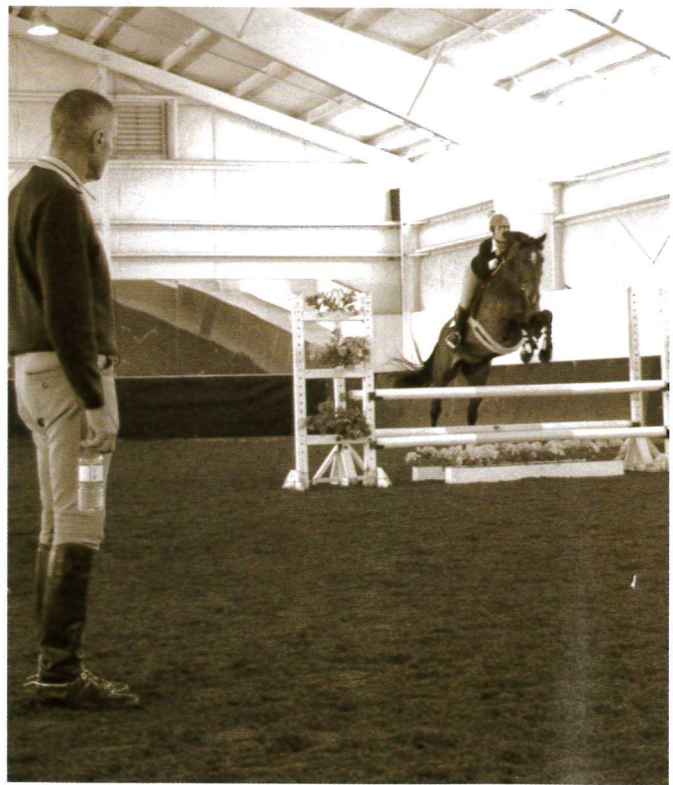
There are no geniuses here; the ancients were geniuses. Copy the ancients who invented this sport.



If it is done wrong, it is very wrong. If it's a little bit wrong, it's very wrong.



A horse walks 4 miles per hour. A slow collective trot is 6 miles per hour. A canter is 10-12 miles per hour. A gallop is 14-16 miles per hour. Knowing pace is very important for jumping.



Oh, this girl is complicated [referring to a rider who talked herself out of the jump, ending up with a refusal.] Just jump it. Pop it, pop it, pop it. Good.



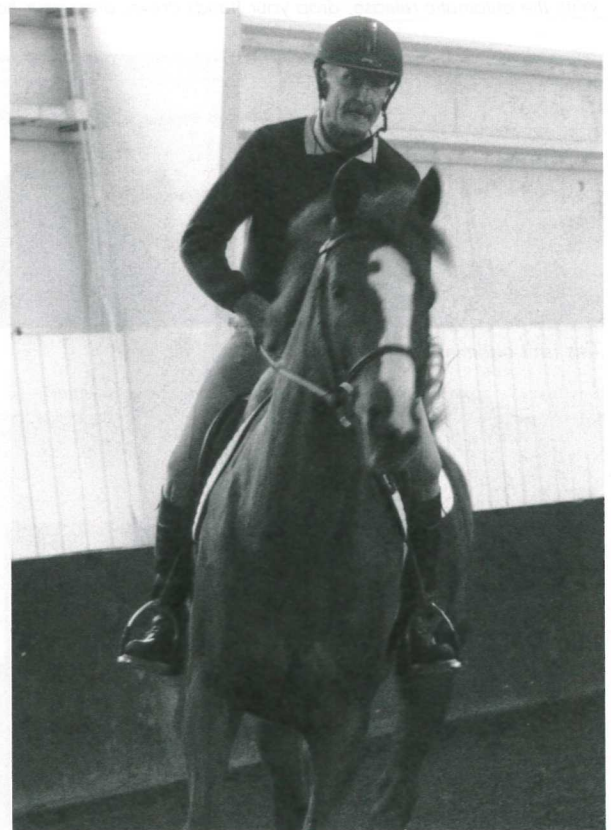
We all have a lack of confidence [at times during riding or, especially, jumping.] What helps that is knowledge. Develop technique.



Place your foot on the outside of the stirrup, with your [little] toe touching the iron. The outside of the stirrup is a much better position than the inside. The inside of the stirrup is a regionalism with Colonel Roberts. If what I am saying is contrary to what you have been taught—that it is not my problem.



Don't be too aggressive with your legs with these fresh horses.



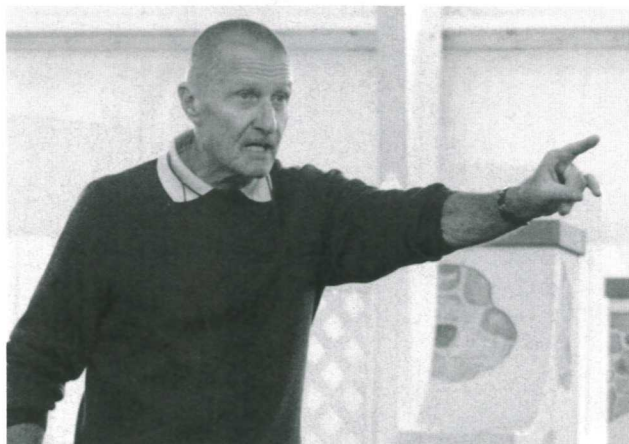
This is a deep sitting, upright position in the sitting trot.



With the automatic release, drop your hands down, drop your hands down along side the horses mane, not perched on the crest of the neck.



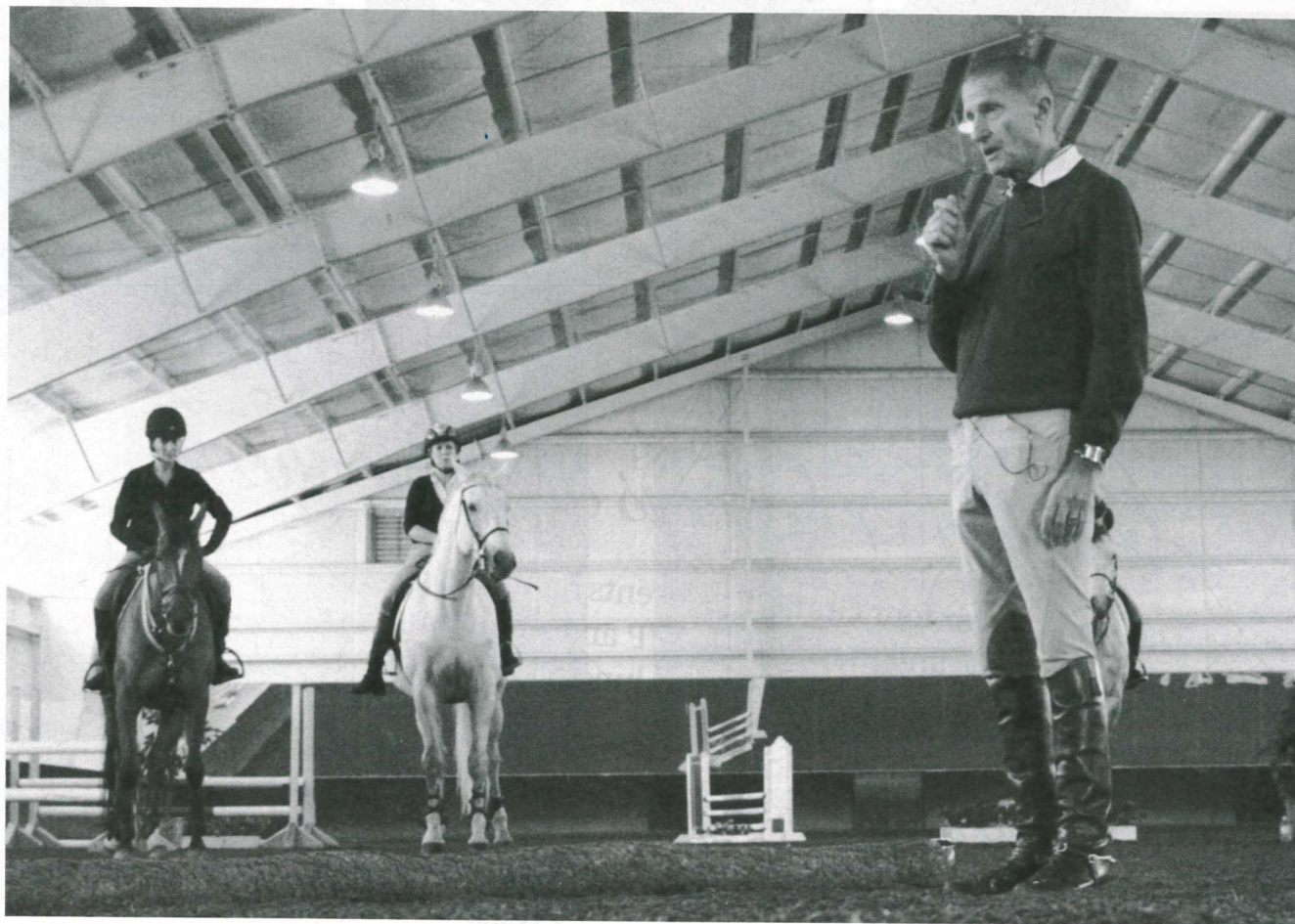
This isn't badminton. This sport is tough. It's high-risk.



Where are your spurs? If I wanted them off I would have taken them off—go get your spurs back. The horse must learn to accept them, as long as they are not too long.



You have dirty boots. You go home and work on your boots. My boots are old, but they are clean. Yours are dirty.



The system I teach is not German, it's more French, but we don't say that.



You can't just sit there like a soup sandwich. Do something.



Every piece of equipment, every piece of tack, every blanket—I keep them meticulously clean, because that is a health issue, a safety issue, and, in the end, an aesthetic issue.