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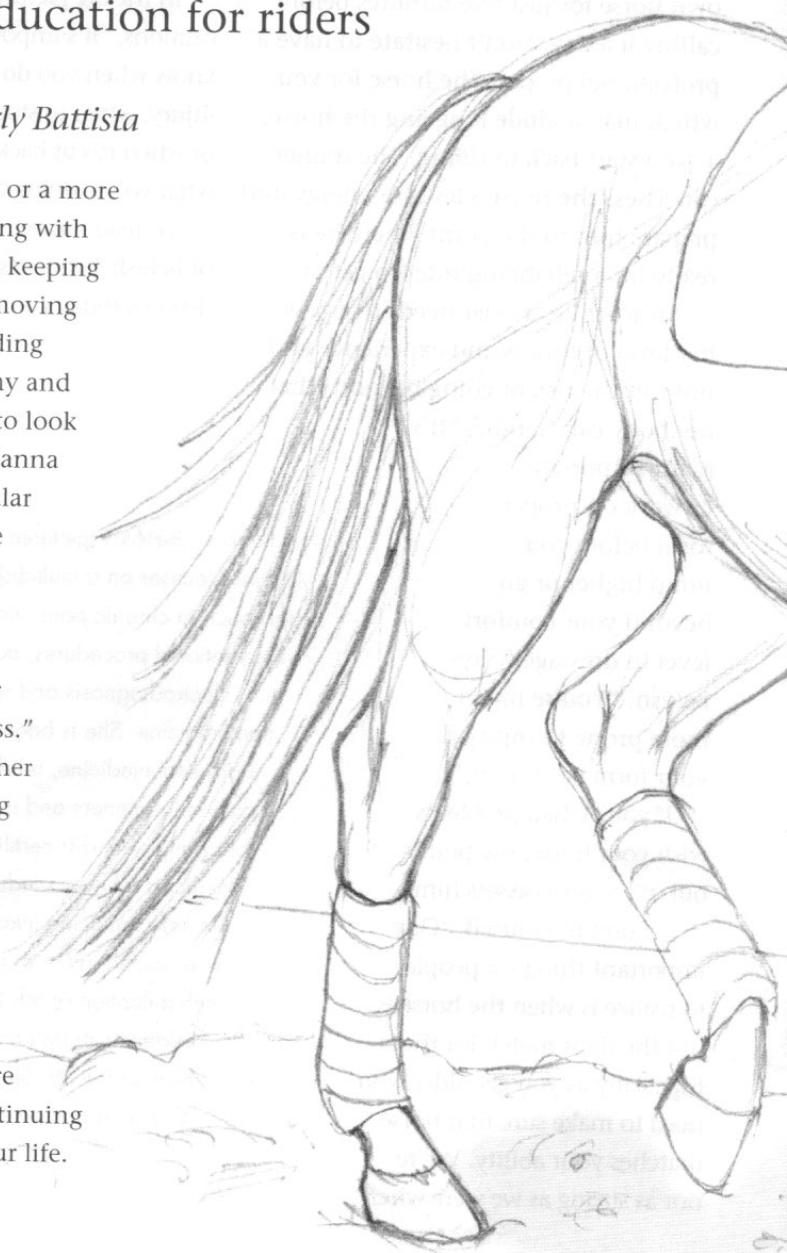
THE TRAINING BETWEEN YOUR TRAINING

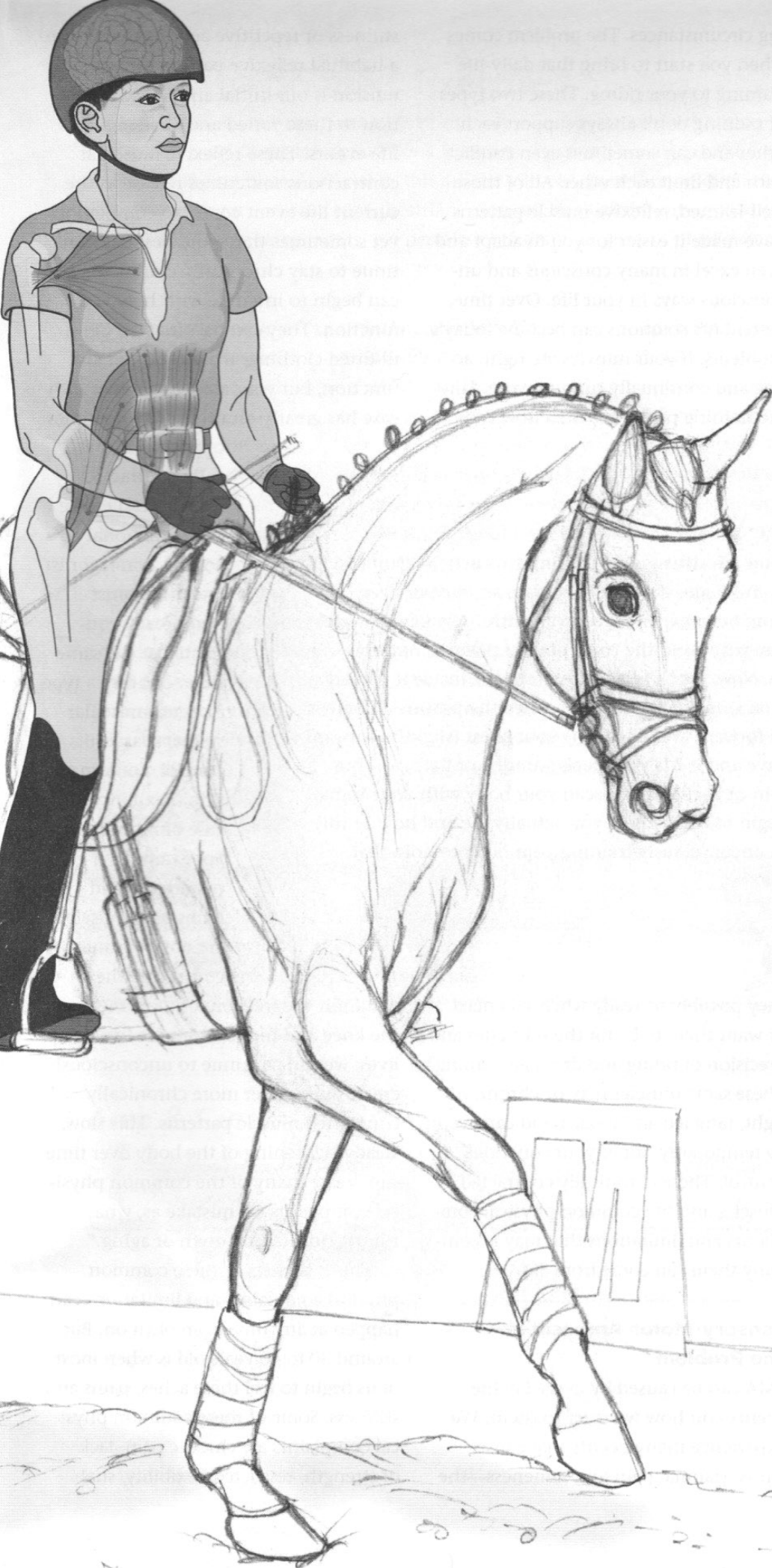
An introduction to Hanna Somatic Education for riders

By Ryan Moschell, CHSE, LMT • Illustrations by Kimberly Battista

Whether you are a competitive dressage athlete or a more leisurely equestrian who just enjoys connecting with your horse and riding, you may struggle with keeping your balance, maintaining optimal posture, moving naturally with your horse, refining natural riding aids, engaging with just the right amount of effort, staying healthy and comfortable between rides and then bringing all of this together to look effortless. As a certified Hanna Somatic educator, I teach clients Hanna Somatic Education® (HSE)—a natural, safe system of neuromuscular education (mind-body training) that teaches you how to alleviate Sensory-Motor Amnesia (SMA). According to the Novato Institute for Somatic Research and Training, “SMA is a habituated state of forgetfulness of how certain muscles feel and how to effectively coordinate them. SMA cannot be cured by treatment, medicine or surgery but can be controlled consciously after a relearning process.” In my time working with equestrian clients, each rider has his or her own riding and living habits. Moreover, I have found that working with equestrian athletes has been highly successful because they are deeply passionate about their sport and intensely focused on continual improvement.

Many of my clients have discovered new possibilities that have been locked away in their muscles and the brain that controls those muscles. As you learn to embody the remarkable adaptability skill of HSE, you will see that it is possible to have more control over and maintain your personal somatic health while continuing to take your riding to the next level of excellence for the rest of your life.





What is Hanna Somatic Education?

Thomas Hanna, PhD, and founder of HSE, coined the words “Somatics” and “Soma” for this discipline. Somatics comes from Greek origins and means “of or relating to the body.” But in the discipline of Somatics, it means “relating to or working with the soma and its proprioceptive senses.” Soma means “the living body experienced from within,” or your own privileged first-person experience and proprioceptive senses. HSE is a remarkable way for a certified Hanna Somatic educator to teach you how to alleviate and even reverse Sensory-Motor Amnesia. Since HSE is cumulative over time you may even be able to prevent it and continually improve your own neuromuscular control and health for the rest of your life.

One of Hanna’s greatest contributions to the field of somatic education was introducing and demonstrating pandiculation. According to the HSE glossary of terms, the pandicular response is an involuntary sensory-motor action-pattern all vertebrates use to arouse the voluntary cortex and muscles after repose. The next time your cat, dog, horse or spouse gets up in the morning you may see him or her do what we typically call the “morning stretch” or “yawning pose.” This movement is actually not the type of static stretch you learned in gym class; rather it is an involuntary pandiculation. All vertebrates do this movement, especially after being still or in the same position for a length of time. They are making deep, shortening muscle contractions followed by a slow, lengthening release. Pandiculation avoids the stretch reflex. The stretch reflex is an automatic muscle contraction in response to a static stretching within the muscle

tissue. It is the brain's way of regulating muscle length so you don't injure yourself during activities. In order to get your chronically contracted muscles to release to their full resting length and healthy muscle tonus, you will need to learn how to harness the power of a voluntary pandiculation, which is Hanna's "interactive sensory-motor method for teaching individuals to immediately and comfortably regain volitional control of habitually contracted muscles."

Training Between Rides

You train many long hours in the saddle in order to work toward a more enjoyable connection with your horse and to find excellence in yourself and your sport. The fact is, most riders are actually training their brain and muscles more hours in their day-to-day life activities such as sitting at a desk, standing in line, using the cell phone, mucking stalls, being in the same position while sleeping all night, et cetera, than they ever will on their horse. This daily-life training is mostly unconscious and is reinforced through sameness and repetition. Although I know some of you would like to sleep and eat in the saddle, for most of you there are still more in-between hours of daily-life training than there are hours spent riding. In the in-between times it is easy to be on autopilot. You typically put your head down and get things done in order to make time for the things you love to do.

I applaud each of you because you have become quite good at making your life work in many varied and challeng-

ing circumstances. The problem comes when you start to bring that daily-life training to your riding. These two types of training don't always support each other and can sometimes even conflict with and limit each other. All of those well-learned, reflexive muscle patterns have made it easier for you to adapt and even excel in many conscious and unconscious ways in your life. Over time, yesterday's solutions can become today's problems. If your muscles are tight, active and continually running your daily-life training programs, then how could

stillness or repetitive actions that create a habitual reflexive pattern. Muscular tension is our initial and reflexive reaction to these varied and challenging life events. These reflexive muscular contractions sometimes release as the current life event comes to completion, yet sometimes these muscles may continue to stay chronically contracted and can begin to interfere with how you function. They can become like tight, ill-fitted clothing, where you can still function, but your ability to move with ease has greatly diminished. Sometimes

opposing chronically contracted muscles can create a dysfunctional co-contraction (agonist and antagonist chronically contracted at the same time, creating a type of neuromuscular splint) that limits control, coordination, flexibility and ease of movement. For example, if your quadriceps and hamstring muscles are both chronically contracted they

Know Your Soma

Try this while you are sitting and reading this article: Don't fix your posture yet. Trust me, stay where you are and just notice your "Soma"—the living body experienced from within. By being aware of what is, you are witness to the truth of your posture, not how you wish it to be. Now, check in and feel from the inside if you are sitting in what you would consider to be a healthy posture. Where is your head (tilted forward and down)? Is your chest (slightly) forward and out or concave and in? Is your back rounded or flat? Are your shoulders rolled in or back? As you scan your body with your Soma, then you may begin to realize how you actually are and how in this moment you are unconsciously training your body to hold that particular posture.

they possibly be ready when you need or want them to be for the subtleties and precision of riding and dressage training? These same muscles may be chronically tight, fatigued and weaker and can even be temporarily out of your conscious control. These chronically contracted muscles and the common physical complaints and limitations that may accompany them can come from SMA.

Sensory-Motor Amnesia is The Problem

SMA can be caused by everyday life events and how we react to them. We experience many events that cause stress, trauma, pain and sameness—the

will limit the freedom of movement of the knee and hip joint. As we live our lives, we can continue to unconsciously create and collect more chronically contracted muscle patterns. This slow, steady tightening of the body over time can create many of the common physical complaints we mistake as, what Hanna called, "the myth of aging."

The awareness of these common physical complaints and limitations can happen at any time from birth on. But around 30 to 40 years old is when most of us begin to feel these aches, pains and stiffness. Some of these common physical complaints are chronic pain, lack of strength, restricted flexibility, shal-

▶▶ Hanna Somatic Exercises

These Somatic movements are a way to embody a part of the exercise known as the Daily Cat Stretch from Thomas Hanna's book *Somatics*. If you can't quite get the feel for these with the text and photos offered in this article, you can view "Somatics on the Move™" a YouTube video on Somatics for equestrians (SomaticHealthSolutions.com/youtube). Before trying any of these movements, get permission from your current physician to do gentle self-regulated exercises.

Movements to work with the Red Light Posture:

Preparing to move:

- Wearing loose, comfortable clothing, lie down on a flat, firm surface. You can use your bed if the floor is not comfortable and you may use pillows and other props to make yourself comfortable. Find a time and place where you can limit distractions (e.g., electronic devices, pets, children).

During Your Somatic Movements:

- Focus on internal sensations of movements.
- Move slowly and gently with the least possible effort. Do not force or strain; it should not be painful.
- Do each movement at least three times.
- Completely relax between movements and take breaks as needed.
- Make these movements part of your daily routine.

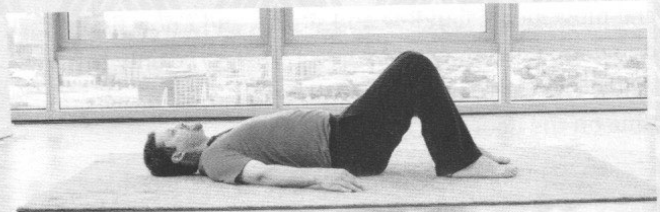
Exercise 1: Arch & Flatten

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, your feet flat on the floor and your arms by your sides.
2. Inhale while arching your lower back up, pausing and releasing it down slowly and with control while exhaling.
3. Flatten your lower back down and release it slowly and with control.
4. Repeat both movements together in a cycle three to five times.

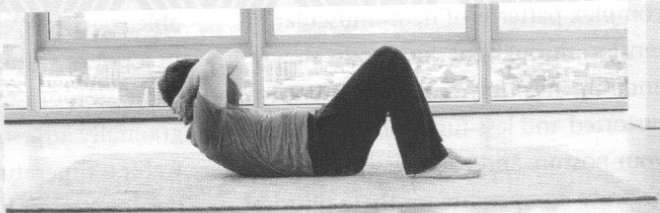
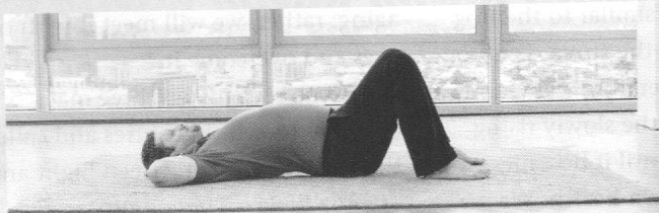
Exercise 2: Arch & Curl

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
2. With both hands behind your head/neck, inhale and arch your lower back.
3. Exhale slowly while tucking your chin forward and curling forward, lifting your head, bringing your elbows closer together while flattening your lower back.
4. Lower your torso, head and arms slowly and with control.
5. Repeat both movements together in a cycle three to five times.

Arch & Flatten



Arch & Curl



▶▶ Extending My Riding Career

By Felicitas von Neumann-Cosel

In early 2015, I was dealing with severe chronic back pain. I had tried many therapies, including stretching, the Feldenkrais Method and physical therapy, but nothing seemed to be effective in the long run. Desperate to find something that worked, I came across a website about Hanna Somatics—a natural, safe system of neuromuscular education (mind-body training) that teaches you how to alleviate chronically contracted muscles. It made perfect sense when I read about it, and I was eager to find something that would give me lasting relief and that I would be able to do wherever I went.

After watching some videos, I realized that I had to find someone to help me learn how to execute the movements. On further research I found Ryan Moschell, a certified Somatic educator in Maryland. After our first session, I walked away as if someone had taken chains off my rib cage, and my back felt better. The most amazing discovery was sitting on a chair that had been most uncomfortable for me that was all of a sudden comfortable.

In the first few months that I continued regular sessions I started to feel differences in many movements of my body. Besides less pain, I could bend and turn easier, even after longer car rides and gardening. But the improved ability to follow the horses' movements left me most excited. It was an unexpected gift that opened doors to be even closer to my horses and gives me hope that I can extend my riding career!

The results of the movements are cumulative. Ryan showed me several movements standing and sitting, and I now find myself on the floor doing the Cat Stretch twice a day. This is the only therapy where I actually look forward to my time on the floor.

low breathing, loss of energy, stiffness, et cetera.

These patterns of chronically contracted muscles can accumulate and weave complex patterns of neuromuscular tension throughout your body, slowly and imperceptibly constricting it into distorted and less-functional postures. As your posture and balance shifts you may begin to compensate for these physical limitations, which further reinforces these newly adapted postures. This can become so much a part of you that you begin to identify with your SMA and feel as if the limitations and discomfort you are experiencing are inevitable and ir-

reversible. This gradual process can be slow and imperceptible to the point that we just adapt to our new way of being and accept the changes as the inevitable aging process.

Human beings are a highly adaptable species. We are similar to the frog in a pot of water on the stove. The frog starts in room-temperature water and gradually adjusts to the slowly rising water temperature until it becomes detrimental to his own health. We can—and do—continually adjust to our environment as it slowly changes, even when it becomes dangerous to our own health.

Hanna says, "Somatics provides us with a way to live under the stressful

demands of an urban-industrial environment and still remain healthy—physically and mentally. It helps us understand the tendency of life in general and of technological societies, in particular, to wear down our well-being. There is no need to give in to this blindly as the unavoidable effect of aging; rather, we will meet it with open eyes and overcome it."

Once I understood the principle, I found myself being able to make little moves even while driving a car. I have since recommended Hanna Somatics to all my students and have seen it make a great difference in their balance, posture and ability to follow the horse's movement with their hips. Intrigued, but very skeptical, I even tried Equine Hanna Somatics with my horses and have seen some profound results. I can only hope more people will find the same help through Hanna Somatics as I did.

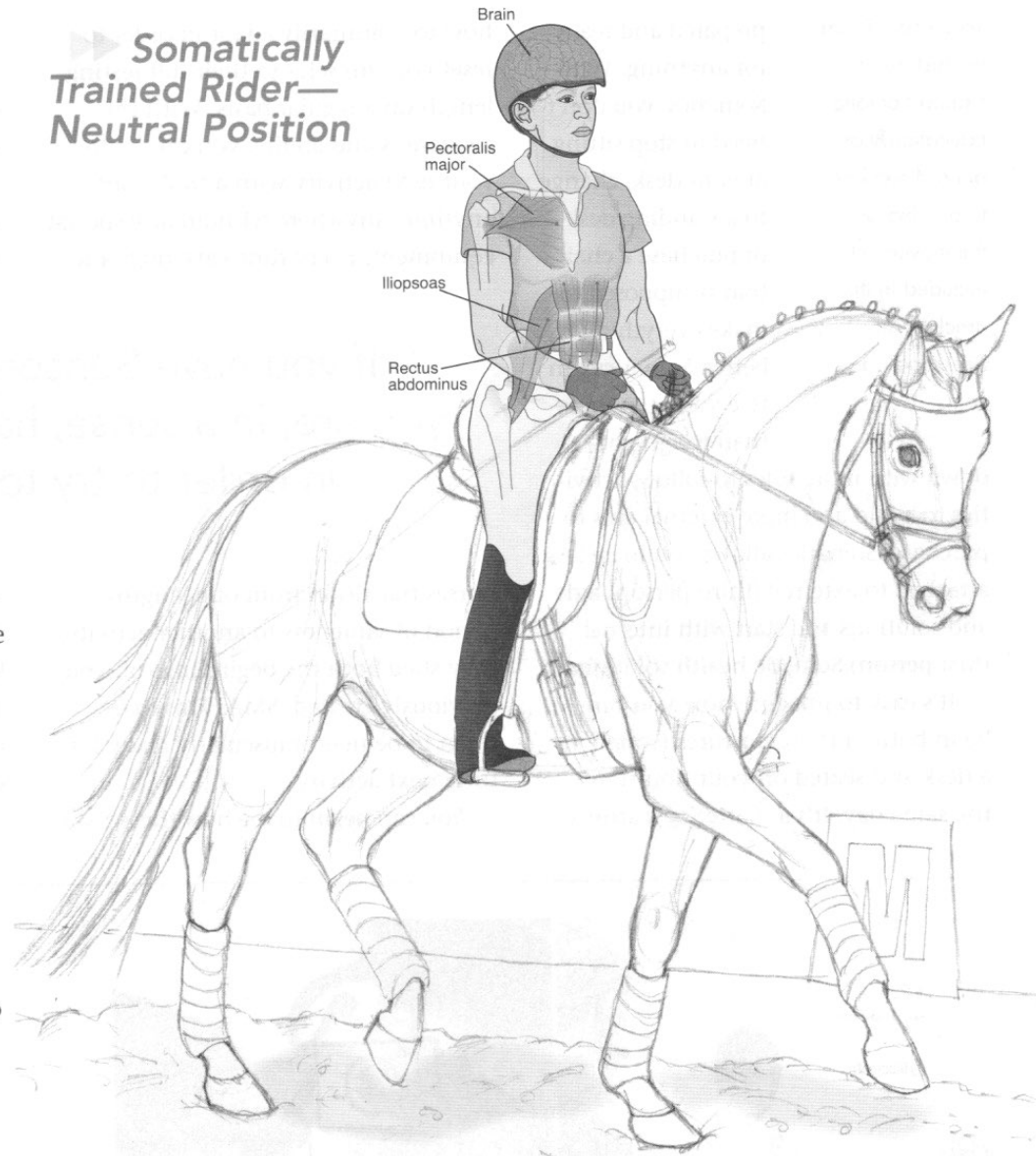
Felicitas von Neumann-Cosel has lived in the U.S. for 30 years, working out of First Choice Farm in Maryland as an international dressage trainer and competitor. Encouraged by her mentor and employer Gene Freeze, she went back to Germany and completed her master degree as an instructor (Reitlehrer FN). Her mount, Tonico do Top, won the BLM Grand Prix Championship for the past four years and the BLM Grand Prix Freestyle Championship the last three years. von Neumann-Cosel has trained numerous horses to Grand Prix.

Hanna recognized three main adaptive reflexive postures and called them the Red Light, Green Light and Trauma Reflex. These multifaceted sensory-motor patterns are what we would commonly call poor posture. The reflexive postures that come from SMA can be so subtle that it's hard to see them without a trained eye or they can be very dramatic and

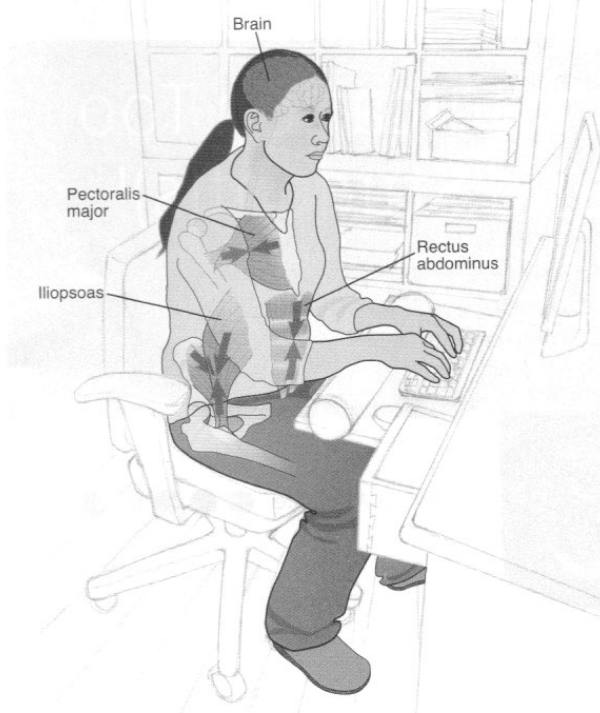
easy to observe even from a distance. Remember that these SMA-driven postures are learned through our reactions to stress, trauma, pain and sameness. We unconsciously learn and embody these patterns and can get so good at them that they can stay active all the time.

The Red Light Posture, also known as the Startle Reflex, is activated when the flexors of your body are contracted. The person who is in this posture may look hunched forward, knees bent, shoulders forward, with a rounded back. The Green Light Posture, also called the Landau Reflex, is when the extensors of your body are engaged. The Trauma Reflex Posture is where the side flexors and/or rotators are chronically contracted. These three postures are the major reflexive patterns that can arise from SMA, but most of us have a combination of all three patterns. The Senile Posture, typically seen in the elderly, is a good example of a combination of these patterns. This posture looks bent over, pulled down to the ground and the person may move in a stiff and limited way.

▶▶ Somatically Trained Rider—Neutral Position



▶▶ Desk Jockey/Daily-Life Training—Red Light Posture



Dressage Rider Versus Desk Jockey

Look at the illustrations of the dressage rider and the desk jockey (shown above and at left). You can see how different these two postures and the muscle contractions that create them are. The rider is sitting upright and the woman at the desk is hunched forward. In life, no matter what we are doing for a sustained period of time with repetition, there can be a type of unconscious training involved. In the illustration of the desk jockey, you may be able to see

how a sustained sitting posture can start to develop and reinforce some of your muscles in becoming shortened and contracted. The woman at the desk is in a reflexive Red Light Posture. The repetition and sameness create and reinforce more layers of SMA.

Now take a look at the muscles of the somatically trained and acutely aware dressage rider. You will see long, supple muscles at their full resting length and optimal tonus (relaxed and ready) that are strong, pain free, flexible and ready when they are needed. Riders are always talking about core strength and stability, but what is equally, if not more, important is for you to Somatically cultivate a well-trained brain and muscles that are

To read about the history of Hanna Somatic Education® or get a direct link to a video of the movements included in this article, visit DressageToday.com.

prepared and ready for anything. With Somatics, you don't need to stop sitting at your desk, change to a standing desk or purchase a chair that is supposed to make everything better. Somatics can free you up rather than weigh you

down with more rules to follow, activities to avoid and more external aids to purchase. Somatics allows you to be less attached to external (third person) aids and solutions and start with internal (first person) Somatic health solutions.

It's easy to imagine how you can be in both of these postures (seated at a desk and seated on your horse) in the same day. It's a matter of learning

how to voluntarily adapt in order to reset your muscles to their full resting length on a regular basis. With this awareness and ability, you can go to your next activity with a fresh start anytime, anywhere without any special equipment. Every time cats, dogs and

patterns and postures can limit your ability to move freely with your own body, let alone try to move freely with your horse's movements. If you have SMA, you are, in a sense, having to fight yourself in order to try to ride properly. The remarkable thing about SMA is that

“If you have Sensory-Motor Amnesia, you are, in a sense, having to fight yourself in order to try to ride properly.”

horses transition from one lengthy period of sameness to another activity, they shed both the beginnings of, and previously created, SMA. This frees them to be neuromuscularly ready for their next activity.

You can begin to see how these SMA

it is possible to alleviate it, prevent it in the future and even reverse the effect it has had over your body and your life. The teacher-learner process of HSE offers you a new awareness and an adaptability skill through clinical Somatic education sessions and daily Somatic maintenance

movements. Knowing how to move Somatically is a remarkable way to reset and release the previously learned SMA patterns that can limit your life. This process prepares your muscles so that they can respond to the movement sequences that you are requesting of them on the spot.

HSE teaches you how to access the chronically contracted muscles that you are aware of as well as discover and gain more conscious control over the muscles you are not yet aware of. This happens through individual, hands-on clinical Somatic-education sessions, where you will gradually learn how to move Somatically and gain more awareness and control of your neuromuscular system.

Daily Somatic maintenance movements will reinforce what you experience in a session as well as

deepen your Somatic awareness and skill on your own. The clinical sessions and daily-movement practice are cumulative and help you to cultivate the adaptability skill to access the places that you know and discover the

unconscious places that over time you will come to know. The ultimate goal is for you to stop having to fight your own body and be able to unlock your peak riding performance for the rest of your life. 🐾



Ryan Moschell is a Certified Hanna Somatic Educator®, owner of Somatic Health Solutions®, LLC, and a leader in the field of Hanna Somatic Education®. He is a nationally certified licensed massage therapist with more than 15 years of full-time experience. Moschell has offices in both Maryland and Washington, DC, where he sees clients for individual clinical Somatic education sessions. He also offers a Somatic Education Vacation™ and travels to you to teach group workshops/clinics worldwide. To learn more about Hanna Somatics and how to get started today, go to SomaticHealthSolutions.com.