



## Pilates and the Dressage Rider

Most of us are familiar with pilates and the benefits of core fitness. Proper use of the core muscles is essential to the dressage rider. I have watched dressage competition and been amazed at how the rider stays composed in the saddle, horse and rider moving in harmony with each other. Having a secure seat and staying balanced while in motion is important.

The ability to stabilize the hip joints while allowing movement of the pelvis involves the biomechanical movement called differentiation, and is specific to both pilates and dressage exercise. Another similarity of pilates and dressage is the synergistic use of muscles, (several muscles working together to provide the movement). In dressage, understanding that the horse is using the same synergy of muscles as the rider is what allows the amazing flow between horse and rider. Balance and weight of the rider is key, even a slight shift by the rider can throw off the horse's balance. The goal is to balance the rider's weight evenly above the horse so that you can follow the motion of the horse and become part of the flow. Learning this subtle balance between you and your horse will allow for a smoother transition from the dressage seat to the forward seat. Keeping the core muscles strong to stabilize and balance the seat, and use of the proper muscles to provide motion with the horse is where practicing pilates can greatly benefit.

One of the muscles used in pilates and dressage work is the psoas major. It provides both stabilization and movement of the pelvis. With the horse, it is this same muscle that the horse uses to "pull up" and push forward. The rider engages the psoas major when balancing and moving with the horse, providing synergistic movement between horse and rider.

Another focus of pilates is stabilization and strengthening of the muscles in the upper body. The shoulder girdle should sit evenly on the spine and move freely. This is important to the dressage rider in their ability to keep the upper body relaxed and composed in the dressage seat. These same muscles need to be strong to respond to tension created when in the forward seat, which requires more balance and quicker response from the upper body.

Pilates exercise focuses on lengthening of muscles which create stronger, more supple muscles. Dressage riders need to be strong, but fluid in their movements, and have the same athletic ability required of their horse. The stronger and more balanced the rider is on the horse, the less exertion is required. The results are improved performance and better dressage scores.

Lisa Becksted  
Paragon Pilates

Looking for a way to stay fit and healthy and also ride better?

### Pilates for Equestrians

Pilates is a form of exercise which is perfectly attuned for the professional rider, focusing on form and fluidity in movement.

Better balance and deeper seat, will result in better performance for both rider and horse.

**Contact: Lisa L. Becksted**  
 Personal Trainer, AFAA 2002 Pilates Instructor PhysicalMind Institute 2003  
 lbecksted@esedona.net 480.580.1503  
 private instruction available in Cave Creek and North Scottsdale

