

# The USDF Bulletin Boards: Join the Discussions!

KATHRYN KING JOHNSON

**D**o you have Internet access? If you do, log on to the USDF's Web site ([www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org)), click on "Forums," and enter a vast and varied community of dressage enthusiasts. Virtual visitors log on from Belgium, the Netherlands, the U.K., Canada, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, and every state in the U.S. to read, learn, and exchange information and ideas—or just "lurk."

Who are the members of this international equestrian community? Dressage judges, trainers, show managers, technical delegates, veterinarians, farriers, breeders, doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists, teachers, accountants, engineers—you name it. We all love horses and dressage, and most of us love to give and get opinions.

The forums are like a village square for dressage enthusiasts. We meet over the fence and chat. We buy and sell horses and tack. We talk about the state of dressage around the world. We mourn together when a beloved horse dies. We rejoice together when a foal is born. We offer support to lose weight, to show at a higher level, or to get rid of those gadgets. We encourage one another to ride better, and we challenge one another to think.

## Getting Started

**Step 1: Register.** When you click on "Forums," you'll then view a "welcome" screen. You can enter the forums as a guest, but only registered users can post new topics or reply to existing messages. To register, click on the "new user" button. Answer the simple prompts on the registration screen; all you need is an e-mail address. Within a few seconds, the program will verify your e-mail address and send you an e-mail message with a passcode. Highlight and copy the passcode; you'll need it in just a minute.

## GUIDE TO INTERNET JARGON

The online culture has its own lingo and shorthand. Here are some commonly used terms and "emoticons."

**FLAME:** To come down hard on someone else's message

**IMHO:** "In my humble opinion"

**LOL:** "Laugh out loud," or "lots of love"

**LURK:** To read without posting

**POST:** A written comment, message, or question

**QH:** Quarter Horse

**ROFL:** "Rolling on the floor laughing"

**TB:** Thoroughbred

**THREAD:** A string of comments on the same subject or question

**TROLL:** An anonymous troublemaker who frequently posts inflammatory questions or replies just for fun

**WB:** Warmblood

**:-) :** A smiley face, often indicating a joke, irony, or good humor. (To look at it, tilt your head to the left.)

**:-( :** An unhappy face, indicating displeasure or confusion

Next, click on the URL—the link in blue at the bottom of the e-mail message—to return to the welcome screen. Enter a user name—computer experts advise against using your full name—and paste your passcode in the designated box. Press "log in."

**Step 2: Changing your passcode and editing your profile.** After you've logged in, you'll see a list of discussion forums on the left side of your screen and another welcome message on the right side. At the top of the screen you will see a black bar with many options, which you can explore later. Click on

"More," then "Edit Your Profile." Delete the asterisks in the passcode box and enter a new password—one that's easy for you to remember yet can't be guessed easily by others. If you don't want other forum users to see your e-mail address on postings, you can hide it using an option in the "Edit Your Profile" section. When you've finished modifying your profile, click "Save" at the bottom of the page.

**Step 3: Reading and posting messages.** There is a discussion forum on every topic of interest to dressage enthusiasts—from freestyles and Junior/Young Riders to breeding and shows. The general discussion forum is the busiest. Click on any forum name and the string of current topics will appear. Choose a topic that piques your inter-



**Molly Martin and Gigolo.** Molly, an FEI rider from the West Coast, and I met on the USDF bulletin board. She helped increase hits to my website and in return, I did this portrait of her and Gigolo.

est, and click on it; the original posting (message) and any responses will appear in the right-hand frame. To practice posting or replying to messages, check out the actual screen shot of the forum, Picture A, and follow the directions below.

1. Choose a conference. In the illustration, we've clicked on "General Discussion."
2. Choose a topic from the next screen, which is not shown. I chose "Saddle for low-withered horse."
3. Click on one of the following:
  - "Post" starts a new topic or thread.
  - "Reply" allows you to reply to previous messages on this topic.
  - "Reply w/quote" allows a point-by-point reply because the original question appears up in the dialog box.
  - "E-mail reply" sends a private e-mail message to the poster—not to the public forum.

A dialog box will appear. Click in it, type your message, and then click on



Through the USDF bulletin board, an Internet friend on the East Coast found my new horse, Feu Du Roi, for me.

Follow the directions on this page, along with the instructions on reading and posting messages to become an active member of the USDF on-line community.

"post." You can preview your message and correct any errors before you send it. Many additional options exist, but these simple instructions will get you up and posting.

### Dressage-Forum "Netiquette"

Perhaps the best way to get started is to introduce yourself to the board as a "newbie." If you have a question about dressage, just ask. Keep in mind that posts are the sole responsibility of the poster and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the USDF. Some topics can be quite lively; ask a question on any topic and you may get one answer or 50. The advice is free, and you don't always know the poster's identity, so take everything you read with the proverbial grain of salt. Still, you'll usually get decent answers to questions about training, showing, equine behavior, and tack. It's up to you to pick and choose from the advice you get.

A sort of forum subculture—of insiders who meet on the boards and begin e-mailing one another privately—does exist. I've participated in USDF's online discussion forums for two years, and I've made lifelong friends as a result. I give clinics to students I would never have met otherwise, and I critique videos of riders from other countries. I have done proofreading for equestrian authors whom I met online. I have painted portraits from photos scanned and sent via e-mail. Best of all, one of my e-pen pals found my new horse, a Selle Français named Feu du Roi, for me.

Join us! ☺

*Kathryn King Johnson of Boulder, CO, is a dressage trainer, a college English teacher, a show manager, and a former board member of the Houston Dressage Society. She writes an equine advice column, "Ask Kathy," for Planet-Pets.com (www.planet-pets.com/askkathy.htm). Visit her dressage Web page at <http://members.xoom.com/kathyjohnson/>*

[www.usdf.org](http://www.usdf.org)