

Test N Train Clinic
at
Coventry Equestrian Center April 17, 2011
By Kristin Hermann

The Test N Train Clinic at Coventry with Lisa Hall judging introduced riders to the new 2011 tests. We had five riders and about ten auditors, but quality is not measured in numbers, as we all experienced insights from this Bronze Medal trainer and the horse and rider combinations from Intro B to First Level Test 1.

To summarize, Lisa handled each rider with diligence and provided helpful advice to improve each riders score. After each rider rode the test she schooled them to make the test better then asked them what three things are they going to do to improve the next test!

Starting at Intro, a junior rider Erin Vensel worked on going more forward, bending in the corners and marching at a walk along with the neck stretching for the free walk. With almost every rider Lisa had them "following the nod" of the horse's head moving forward and back at the walk and canter with elastic elbows. She said by following the nod, this helps the horse's shoulder to come more forward. This helped to improve the free walks and the canter for several riders.



Erin riding Intro B

The first Training Level rider, Donna Labuda, also worked on corners and adding activity to her trot. She learned how to keep her horse up at the poll and not to drop the contact. She also was taught how to increase the length of her horse's trot stride by enhancing the upward post of her posting trot. Reminded to control the horse's gaits by half halting with the outside rein, Donna improved her riding over all and felt excited to be riding so well at Training Level on a horse she has been training herself.

Moving into First Level tests Lisa was again helpful. She reminded Robyn Gallimore Jones on Merlyn that for a Free Walk the horse is to stay on contact and to not just drop the reins! This movement is always double points and you do not want to blow it. She asked Robyn what she thought were her areas of weakness and they agreed. Immediately they started working on that S curve in First Level 1 from E to X to B. "The judge wants to see you straight on centerline in between those two half ten meter circles," Lisa said. They schooled



Donna and her thoroughbred/
paint cross Sambucca

this movement by combining the half ten meter arc with half circles back in each direction. Once Robyn and Merlyn perfected the half circle in each direction they returned to the S curve at X much improved! This exercise also helped to straighten the halt at X in the second test as Merlyn was more on the aids.

The half halt was again emphasized as a way to keep the horse balanced before going into ten meter circles or half circles. "Ride the half halt like it is a pause," said Lisa, "and use it when ever you need one. The horse has to be balanced." She again said that posting higher and emphasizing the up post will encourage the horse to lengthen the trot. Other words of advise were: "Don't hold him and don't let him run away either and when cantering circles keep the horse's head in the middle of the shoulders, do not over bend the neck trying to make the 15 meter canter circles which are required in First Level." The correct bend and having balance is important at First Level, Lisa said. She suggested lots of transitions keeping the horse straight, spiraling in and out and offering the inside rein (as in Uberstreichen) so the horse learns self carriage.



Robyn and her Flying W Farms Friesian Thoroughbred cross Merlyn

Robyn's horse is young and a large half Friesian cross, riding First Level for the first time is usually a challenge and maneuvering a large animal with a huge stride can be exciting, to say the least. By challenging herself to move up the levels this lesson was excellent as both horse and rider combination improved and learned how to apply Lisa's instruction. "Give the inside rein, you can't keep holding your horse with your reins, he has to carry himself! And, if you get him even more in front of your leg he will stop paying attention to outside distractions."

At one point during the rides Lisa could not find her whistle in one of her many pockets. Auditor and volunteer Joan Mazur stepped right in and showed us her incredible real whistle from her own voice. Certainly an entertaining moment for us dressage divas!

During the break a discussion on the rollkur came up because of the judging at the recent Lake Erie Prix De Ville horse show. Lisa said she read that if a horse is behind the bit the judges will take one point off your movement. Everyone at the clinic had a opinion from the difference between a horse being in front of the leg but giving at the poll, behind the leg and on the bit, to in front of the leg but not giving at the poll, the poll being the highest point, horses in the olympics breaking behind the poll, how open should the space at the throat latch be and whether the horse should be on the vertical or in front of the vertical when stretching? More opinions were offered about what Classical dressage really is and how it differs from competition dressage. Of course, participants at this clinic solved all problems! No rollkur in Western Pa. and, should we change our style of riding to appease a judging fad? The answer was no!

Lisa who accepted everyone's opinion said a lot of trainers believe that riding the horse behind the vertical helps to loosen the back. She personally tries to not ride any of her horses behind the vertical. "Even if I ride them lower, I push the nose out in front of the vertical," she said. However Lisa mentioned that other trainers are very successful training this way. Lisa also pointed out that riding behind the vertical is not rollkur or hyperflexion. "Behind the vertical is seen as an evasive move and the horse not being ridden in self-carriage. Rollkur is an extreme maneuver where the horse is almost biting his chest or its head is being pulled to the rider's foot... this actually causes physical and emotional distress in a horse and should NEVER be used, I am ABSOLUTELY against rollkur and am glad it's being stopped. The rollkur breaks at the fourth vertebra, which is way too deep, and not at the poll. A horse should arch from the base of its neck. The lower the level in training the lower the neck to develop the horse's top line for advance work. There is ambiguity in this sport," continued Lisa, "everyone has an opinion. Each horse should be ridden according to its individual conformation."

Renee Shiska was the last rider of the day. Lisa worked on relaxing the horse's gaits and, at Renee's request bringing her horse more up onto the vertical and when she stretched down keeping her in front of the vertical. As an accomplished rider Renee learnt how to keep her exactly on the vertical, not a half inch behind or a millimeter above. Only such a talented rider could accomplish this! Lisa did tell Renee not to change her riding style for any judge because obviously she is a successful trainer and one judge's opinion should NOT change how you do things. "If it has been working for you stick to it," Lisa said.

This 2011 Test N Train was once again a vat of information. Coventry Equestrian Center was a quiet atmosphere for riders to come out and prepare for this year's show season. Nina Catanzarite brought print outs from the USDF on how to scribe as well as a home made apple pie! Seasoned riders and competitors Joan Mazur and Nancy Spiker, as well as, junior rider Rose Arhrem learned how to scribe and score. And once they had acquired these new skills they began teaching others. Certainly this clinic was valuable and has encouraged more WPDA members to have the competence, confidence and skill to volunteer and show at a future WPDA schooling and recognized show.



Renee riding Alianna

Other tidbits of information from Lisa Hall

The difference between a free walk and a loose rein. The free walk is on the aids with contact, the loose rein, as in leaving the arena on a loose rein, is with no contact.

When entering the parameters surrounding the dressage arena nod hello at the judge as you pass. If the bell rings before you pass the judge turn around and go in the arena because you only 45 seconds to get to X and if you pass the judge you may not have enough time. If you have passed the judge, do not turn around go straight into arena at A.

After saluting at the end of your test always walk straight ahead toward the judge. Maybe they want to talk to you, maybe not. But do not turn at X after the halt and walk out.

Always show a level below what you are training at home.

