

Clinic Report by Madelyn Guthrie

Junior/Young Rider

2015 Platinum Performance/USDF JR/YR Clinic- Region 2

October 10th-11th, 2015

Featuring Charlotte Bredahl-Baker

Hosted by Concord Ridge Equestrian Center, St. Joseph, Michigan

This past weekend I attended the 2015 Platinum Performance Junior/Young Rider Clinic run by Charlotte Bredahl-Baker. The clinic was held at the beautiful Concord Ridge barn in St. Joseph, Michigan through October 10th to October 11th. However, my horse and I arrived a day earlier in order to participate in a one-day clinic on October 9th run by Charlotte as well. The horse who I am currently riding and brought to the clinic is a twenty year old Trakehner gelding, Tannehauser, whom we call Timmy for short. Timmy has been trained and competed for several years at the Grand Prix level, and I have been riding him for around two years now. Last year we competed FEI Juniors and attended the Festival of Champions and the North American Junior Young Rider Championships, placing in the top ten. Now looking towards the future, we are aiming to compete in FEI Young Riders this coming 2016 show season. As many know, the jump from Juniors to Young riders is a large one, and so I was thrilled when I heard that I had been accepted into this clinic with Charlotte because I knew it would be extremely helpful in our jump to the next level.

Our clinic began on October 9th, and it was quite a kick start to the weekend, being that Charlotte rode my horse for the whole 45 minutes instead of me. Now, I don't know about you, but it is certainly not every day for me that I get the opportunity for an Olympian and a rider as accomplished as Charlotte to not only sit on my horse, but to train him. I truly learned more from the sidelines than I ever had before, watching her work with and transform a horse whose quirks and strengths I know like the back of my hand. Charlotte has worked with Timmy and me a few times before so she knows that he is an extremely kind and puts all of his heart into his work. Along with this wonderful enthusiasm for the work however, the rider is at times faced with some challenges along the lines of making sure the half-halts are given precisely and receive an acceptable response. Timmy has such a large and powerful motor behind that more times than not he is more than happy to pretend like the reins hold little meaning to him, and to just let all of his energy spill out the front, while taking the riders energy simultaneously! As well as sometimes loading too much energy into the riders hands, Timmy also has a tendency to be less willing to give and bend in his neck and body to the left, essentially always falling onto his left shoulder and giving the feeling of being "not there" on the right rein. With this in mind, I was extremely anticipating the opportunity to be able to watch Charlotte ride him, and to see how she would handle these weaknesses, and hopefully improve them. Charlotte rode him for

no less than 45 minutes and throughout the entirety she weaved endless transitions into their work, no matter what exercise or gait they were working on in the moment. Transitions from walk to halt on a circle, transitions to trot from canter on the straightaway, transitions from canter to walk midst a pirouette- there were transitions everywhere. As she told me later, she would simply not let him proceed in the current gait or exercise if he even began to become stiff on that left side, or start to tune out her half halts. Drama free but determined, she would just bring him back every time she felt that she had lack of control in some aspect, no matter how large or small.

The following day when I sat on Timmy and began my warmup, I could instantly feel a change in him. He was more respectful to not only my half halts and left rein, but he was more respectful overall, and I didn't have the feeling that I was just a passenger being taken on a ride- I had a say too! As we began our warmup with Charlotte I learned that one of her favorite warmup exercises began with a figure 8 pattern in the trot. You would start on the figure 8 with a half circle being your first, and then from that half circle you would proceed across the diagonal and leg-yield in the direction of go all the way to the wall, or whatever distance most benefited your horse. I found this to be an extremely helpful exercise in the warmup to begin to influence the bending and sideways movement of my horse, and essentially just getting his body moving fluidly and effectively from my aids. Following that exercise, I soon found out that one of Charlotte's philosophies is that she always starts her horses on their better sides so that they are always starting on a positive note. With this in mind, we started off working going to the left and first Charlotte just simply wanted to see how the effectiveness of my half halts were, and how well he was listening to me. Timmy was being highly respectful of all my aids, and I knew that Charlotte's schooling on him the previous day had really transferred over. With this being the case, we were then able to proceed onto some of the more involved things, like movements from the Prix St. George!

Over the next two days Timmy and I, guided by Charlotte's experienced eye, were able to run through the Prix St. George in pieces, and really take the time to study and perform each of the movements separately as well. For Timmy and me, the hardest movement in the test is the right canter pirouette. The reason this is a difficult spot for us is because since Timmy likes to spill out the left rein onto his left shoulder, it is hard to continuously keep that shoulder in place and turning to the right, while keeping everything else in check too like the impulsion from behind, the tightness of the pirouette, and exedra. However, Charlotte provided us with a wonderful exercise that I found to be really helpful with eliminating some of the overall "awkwardness" of the right pirouette (although this exercise can be used in either direction). We would begin with a pirouette to the right in the walk, and stay in the pirouette until I felt that everything was in line and it was the best possible walk pirouette that we could achieve. Once we had that established, we would then pick up the canter from the walk while staying in the pirouette, with nothing changing except for the gait. I found this to be extremely helpful to

start it from the walk pirouette instead of just entering it from a straight line, being that you already have the bend in the body and weight transferred on the hind legs established before beginning. It was immeasurably helpful to have Charlotte's expertise and judge's eye on us while we worked through the test, and to hear not only both her compliments on the good, and her criticism on the bad, but to have her provide us with exercises to improve on the movements that we find difficultly in.

As a whole, this weekend turned out to be a highly educational experience, and opportunity for growth in my riding and partnership with Timmy. I came out of it a lot more confident in our abilities to ride the Prix St. George and our ability for Young Riders, as well as realizing what our definite weaknesses are, and what we need to do in order to improve them. Charlotte also re-instilled in me the importance of making sure that the basics are covered and perfected before moving on to the "fun things" like higher-level movements. I cannot thank Dressage4Kids, Lendon Gray, and everyone else involved for providing me with this opportunity. This is another huge step in my riding ladder to future success.