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Dressage4Kids Scholarship Essay

November 2016 Clinics

In November, I was able to take two clinics with British dressage and event rider and trainer, Moray Nicholson due to the generous support of Dressage4Kids. In these clinics with my horse Duncan, I learned many new training techniques and areas in which Duncan and I will focus our training over the winter as we prepare for next show season.

Duncan and I spent last summer showing training and first level and so we are just now beginning to focus on his real collection work. We had introduced the idea of collection earlier in the year, but we waited until the fall to begin to make it a bigger focus. Moray explained to me that Duncan naturally has big, swingy gaits and does not find making his stride longer a problem. In fact, when I first bought Duncan and still sometimes to this day, his tendency was always to rush and go too quick in his tempo. He is an Appendix Quarter Horse, but has naturally big and fluid gaits. Moray explained that now was the time to focus on collection and asking him to slow his tempo and shorten his strides. This was a challenge for Duncan since his preference is to speed up.

We spent the majority of our clinics working in the trot. We did a number of exercises to help develop a collected trot that had a steady rhythm and slow, even tempo. Lateral work comes fairly easily to Duncan, so we worked in shoulder-in and shoulder-fore as we were going large. We also practiced the travers to ask him to engage his hind end more. We then worked on a circle, spiraling it in and out in order to ask him to engage and maintain a tempo around the circle. Moray emphasized ensuring that the rhythm stay the same. He pointed out the importance of the training scale and reminded me that rhythm must always come first. I have a tendency to overcorrect for Duncan's learning mistakes which can lead to abrupt changes in the rhythm. To help me to correct this problem, we worked on

lengthening the stride, but maintaining the same even rhythm. Then we would shorten the stride again and focus on maintaining the rhythm. This proved to be a difficult exercise for both me and Duncan, but it was very helpful and I have been using it in my training since the clinics.

We then moved into the canter work. When I first bought Duncan, he had little dressage training and really only had one “speed” in the canter, which was fairly fast. It has gotten better, and he now can produce a nice working canter and lengthening as well. However, again, what he struggles with is the collection. We worked on bringing the canter back and again maintaining an even tempo. Because collection in the canter is still fairly new for Duncan, we only did very short periods of collection and then released him into a working canter. Moray told me to practice this in all of my rides and gradually I will be able to get more strides of collected canter. He also suggested practicing lateral work within the canter to improve my aids while asking for collection.

The clinics were very educational and useful for both my learning and that of Duncan’s. It was fun to push Duncan to a new level of difficulty and see him respond positively. The exercises Moray gave me to work on over the winter are very useful and I plan on using them as I continue to train Duncan in preparation for the show season next summer.