

Lendon Gray Scholarship Report 2009

By: Taylor Noonan Lessons with Tanya Rennie

I was given the Lendon Gray Scholarship to help pay for six lessons with Tanya Rennie. My family owns a horse named Magical aka Maggie who I am now competing at the FEI Junior level. Tanya Rennie is a FEI rider and trainer and I have been riding with her for 5-6 years. My goal when applying for the scholarship was to qualify for the North American Junior/Young Rider Championships. Most of my lessons were focused on preparing for qualifying for shows and then fixing certain problems that were discovered while showing.

During my lessons we mostly worked on getting me to loosen up and to remain “like Gumby” so I could stay following Maggie’s movement. I tend to tighten up my arms and ride with them board straight. Tanya really got after me whenever I tightened up and I got “tied up” a few times to keep my elbows bent and my hands down and together. When I become tight, I tend to stop following, especially in the canter, so a few minutes of each lesson were spent in a very forward canter with me exaggerating my following. In the trot, I worked on keeping my seat open and depending more on my seat and leg instead of my hand. In tests, Maggie gets very strong and I tend to go straight to my hand, so we practiced changes within the gaits using only my seat so I could practice using my seat in the half-halts. After I rode in a show, we really emphasized the medium and extended trot, because in the tests she had fallen out of rhythm and she had cantered when I tried to collect her. We practiced very forward to very collected transitions, and we practiced putting a few steps collected in the middle of my mediums so she would not just decide to fly across the diagonal. I also had to practice half pass and making sure Maggie was hot, hot, hot off my lateral aids because she tended to leave her haunches behind. Finally we really pushed the changes because she was consistently late behind in the test. My “homework” after my show was to ride a million changes with someone on the ground to get the feeling before, during, and after a clean change.

These were the biggest issues I had during the six lessons I had with Tanya.

Maggie's biggest problem is her back and hind end. She tends to hold her back which prohibits her from tracking up. So the warm up of every lesson started with a very stretchy trot with a lot of action in her joints but not necessarily very forward. She is a very forward thinking horse, so we have to work very hard to have an effective half-halt that really makes her sit but one that will keep the energy. Her hind end is still gaining strength so we did a lot of changes within the gaits and we did a lot of counter canter. She is fairly green at the changes so we worked on keeping her together before and after the change because she tended to sprawl out and fall into my hands after a change. In the test, we have a movement where we do a canter half pass into the change so we had to make sure she did not anticipate the change because she tends to want to take over and become "the driver" especially in tests.

Overall most of my lessons were spent working on my position and effectiveness with my aids, because when I got it right she was usually correct as well. Since the lessons were usually right in between my shows, they were spent going over tests from the last show and fixing specific problems that arose during the tests. I made more progress in those six or so weeks than I did all winter, and it showed. My first scores at

NEDA Spring were a 61% and 57% and by my last show they had gone up to a 65% and 64% with a 69% on my freestyle. Thank you so much for the scholarship that allowed me to fulfill a dream!