

What an incredible experience this was! I am so thankful to Lendon Gray and Dressage4Kids for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Conrad Schumacher and Lilo Fore Clinic at Ashby Stock Farm. Thank you Nancy Later-Lavoie for hosting such a fantastic event and to everyone else responsible for making this happen!

I learned quite a bit from observing other riders' lessons; Mr. Schumacher and Ms. Fore spoke about the importance of transitions. Christoph Hess was mentioned because he once stated that, as a rider, you should "trot into the walk", meaning the rider shouldn't lose the rhythm or the energy simply because it is a downward transition. Mr. Schumacher and Ms. Fore both explained that the transition is given from the body and it should be equally as forward as an upward transition.

One of the most interesting discussions that both clinicians had with the audience was how to understand judges and the way in which they think. Both Mr. Schumacher and Ms. Fore believed that if a judge doesn't score a rider well on a particular movement, it doesn't mean that the rider should repeatedly school the movement to improve the score. Instead, Mr. Schumacher said that it was the riding and skill behind the movement that would improve the mark, he felt it was important to go back and fix things such as the connection, for instance, to enhance the rider's score. Along the same line, everyone was advised to not feel discouraged by a bad score, tough comments or low marks. They warned us not to improve the score by trying to fix everything all at once. Instead, we as riders should target a specific area and work on it as to not over face our horses. Ms. Fore commented that as a judge they have to say what is right and wrong, but it is important to be fair to your horse by picking one thing to improve for the next test instead of everything.

One of the areas that I needed help with was my canter pirouettes. Relaxation and adjustability have been our biggest goals, and Mr. Schumacher's exercises helped improve both areas tremendously. He began by having me canter, halt, rein back, canter and then ride a half pirouette. I felt this improved my connection and allowed me to get my horse's hind-end more underneath him while also gaining more relaxation and control over the topline. At times, Willoughby can anticipate the pirouette, but I found that this made him wait for my aids. To help improve the relaxation, Mr. Schumacher had us school a different exercise. The first part involved an 8m circle in the corner, followed by a half pass to the quarter line, then 4-5 strides of stretching long and low, then I pick up my reins and continued to half pass to the centerline. I repeated this exercise 4-5 times. By the sixth time, after the last half pass, once I arrived at the centerline, I rode the half pass into a pirouette. I felt that this exercise helped released a lot of my horse's tension over his back while also preventing any level of anticipation.

To improve our trot extensions, Mr. Schumacher showed us an exercise that helps prevent running within the movement. After riding onto the diagonal, we did a series of

transitions from halt to an extended trot, and back again to a halt for the entire length of the diagonal. I realized that I was rushing the movement too much, and instead needed to establish more of a passage feeling in the extension. I felt an immediate difference. Not only was Willoughby more collected and up off his forehand, but he was able to engage more with his hind-end and we stayed more in synch, riding each and every step together.

During another rider's lesson, Mr. Schumacher was working on the half pass, trying to improve the energy, elevation and collection. He asked the rider to "almost walk" as they approached the corner; immediately, ride an extended trot on the short side and in the next corner, half halt and "almost walk." I saw a remarkable difference between the before and after. The exercise was successful in elevating the horse and creating a higher, yet positive level of energy.

Mr. Schumacher stressed the importance of our warm up. He felt that relaxation is key in the beginning of the ride, encouraging long and low and an element of a stretch in the horse's frame. If the rider doesn't have the roundness over the back, the steadiness in the hand and a forward moving tempo, Mr. Schumacher questioned how we could ever expect to do anything. A short bit of advice I received was in the canter work, where Mr. Schumacher encouraged me to ride an extended canter in my hips, but not in my hands so that I was encouraging a nice big canter with a lot of impulsion. With a steady, balancing hand, but a forward moving seat, I felt an immediate difference.

While I mostly worked with Mr. Schumacher, I had the pleasure of being judged by Ms. Fore, who gave me insight on what top-quality judges are looking for in a horse and rider. Her comments of engagement, accuracy and harmony between horse and rider helped me approach each and every movement with more precision and quality. This was an amazing experience and I am so thankful I was able to be apart of it. Thank you Nancy Later-Lavoie for hosting the clinic and for Lendon Gray and Dressage4Kids for making it possible for me to attend!