



I would like to thank D4K for providing me with a scholarship to attend a clinic with Felicitas von Neumann-Cosel at the Chesapeake Dressage Institute. I have been waiting a long time to ride with Felicitas, but the stars finally aligned for it to actually happen! I used the opportunity as preparatory instruction for my first Gypsy Vanner breed show. I went with the intention of finding the best way to ride my mount, Marley, so that he would be able to express his gaits and showcase his abilities outside the confines of a dressage ring. In previously auditing Felicitas, I found that she was encouraging of finding “flow” in the ride and taught the rider to embrace the expression of the horse through effective riding.

Marley has been a wonderful learning opportunity considering his breed’s predispositions. The Gypsy Vanner was foundationally bred with the intent to pull caravans which quite differs from the task of dressage. Traditionally the breed is meant to be of strong bone and considerable bulk; the prospects of Gypsy “sport types” is quite controversial to this day. In working with Marley, his challenges have proven to be his lateral walk, finding his balance and breaking his dependence on his under neck. I started Marley back in late August of 2022 so we’re both in stepping-stone-stages. For reference, we are competing in Intro B/Training 1 tests.

In addressing his lateral walk, Felicitas had me allow with the rein matching whatever front leg was coming forward. This was coupled with the alternation of leg aids in the walk. His lateral walk is exacerbated by a tighter back, so it was helpful to stand and slowly settle myself back into the saddle. “Settle” seems to be much more true to the term than “sit” or “sink” as there is an element of lightness to it.

Finding an effective way to quickly and lightly have Marley give in the base of his neck was to circle as soon as he even considered some stiffness. We wanted to work on the straights and utilize the full ring in preparation for his flat classes to come. The circles to establish softness in the base of his neck was an exaggerated way of simply applying an indirect aid. Eventually he would become soft on the straight by moving my inside rein to his neck, almost applying a soft touch to the under neck.



*A dramatic demonstration of softening Marley's under neck via indirect aid and a more subtle comparison.*

The final “aha” moment of the day came in preparing for my upward canter transitions. This particular transition has proven difficult to me due to a hunter/jumper background. I struggle to plug in and set the horse up as I have a tendency to just give into the transition, providing no structure. Felicitas made the point that, if I were to simply start to run on my own two feet, the start of the movement would be a lift of the hip. This statement glued into my head how I need to lift the inside hip and start the transition with the inside leg. Lifting the hip allowed for a more fluid transition that allowed Marley to step under with his hinds and it also forced me to sink into my seat bones more. Also, as a side note- there is no shame in standing to smooth out the ride in baby horses!



Overall, riding with Felicitas was a wonderful experience! The forty-five minute session provided me with take-aways that really changed difficult aspects of our partnership. Continued practice of these pieces allowed for a successful Florida showing and significantly improved dressage scores. The “flow” of the ride has become much more tangible!

