

Scooby and I went to our fourth TEAM clinic, third with Lendon Gray these past couple of days; the 25th and 26th. We had two great rides and I learned so much during the lessons and lectures. I was very pleased to have finally gotten my polo wraps 'Lendon approved'! I wrote a little about what I learned from the lectures and rides.

Lectures:

Tuesday morning started out with the usual welcoming lecture at 7:30 AM. Lendon gave the one person who's first TEAM clinic it was the folder of handouts, and then talked to us all about the tests: parts of the horse, parts of the tack, and the test on the handouts. Our lunchtime lecture that day was about body condition scoring, topline evaluation, and weight taping. Dream Acres who kindly hosted the clinic let us put our hands on a few of their horses to look for any fat pockets while body scoring. We learned about the five places on the horse where to look and feel to score the horses 1-9, one being extremely thin, nine being extremely fat. The five places you look when body scoring a horse are: the crest, ribs, behind the shoulder, withers, and tail head. You don't want to see the ribs, but be able to lightly bring your hands over them to feel them, and you don't want to feel any spongy fat pockets at the other four points. We then learned about the grades of the top line evaluation and how to weight tape a horse. The formula that's most accurate for weight taping is the length of our horse from point of shoulder to point of buttocks x girth length all the way around x girth length again, divided by 330. Our final lecture of the day Tuesday was a yoga lesson. I came a little late as I was the last rider of the day but we learned how important it was to have flexible hip flexors as a rider, and to think in the "attic" not the "basement. The "attic" being a place for positive thoughts and the "basement" a place of negative thoughts. We were challenged to have our thoughts in the "attic" while holding a two minute plank.

Our final lectures on Wednesday were about a proper warm up and rider alignment. Lendon started off with a lecture on warming up properly bright and early at 7:00 AM. Warm up isn't just your walking around the arena when you first get on. Warming up starts in the stall, while grooming. Lendon told us to always have both hands on the horse, one hand grooming, the other feeling for lumps, bumps, swelling, or heat. And after we're done walking out horses for about ten minutes, when we first pick up the trot, we should always do a soundness check. To check if the front legs are sound, turn a corner and do a diagonal, into your other corner, making sure you change your posting diagonal, to be sure you're on the correct one the whole time. Then, to see if the hindlegs are sound, go onto a longside and change your posting diagonal a few strides, then switch it back. Things should feel the same on each diagonal.

Our lunch lecture was done by Jennifer Mitchell on rider alignment. Jennifer is a physical therapist and worked on a few of us students, showing stretches and how to feel if our hips are aligned. She also talked about hip flexors, and to have better movability in our pelvis they need to be loose, which will help riders better sit the trot and the horse in general.

Rides:

I was the last rider of the day Tuesday so I was able to watch every ride except the one before mine. Lendon had many of the riders doing turns on the haunches or walk pirouette,

which I did not know there was a difference between until my lesson. A walk pirouette has that touch more of collection, where the hind legs are really being picked up and set down in place, where as the turn on the haunches will be a little bit larger. In my lesson, Lendon asked what I had been doing for shows. I told her I had been getting upper 60's at second level. The first thing she asked was "Why not FEI ponies?" We then jumped right into going through the movements in the pony tests. We started out doing half-passes where she gave me the exercise of starting the half pass and ending it in more of a leg yield and then going directly into a shoulder in once I was on the track. This exercise was done so when we did the half-pass zigzag, when I switched bends and half-passed the other way, I could straighten inbetween and start my next one shoulder leading. We then worked a bit on our walk pirouettes. We also worked on a five step reinback that goes directly into a canter. The FEI pony tests are the only dressage tests that have that move, which was fairly tricky. A fun movement we went onto next was a short diagonal in the canter and letting the reins go three strides. Scooby was very nice at that and stayed steady. We went through the rest of the movements including a four loop canter serpentine with a simple change at X, which meant going from counter canter to counter canter. I was very pleased with the ride, as was Lendon. The Scoobert had been a very good boy!

The next day (Wednesday) After my warm up Lendon read the FEI Pony Team test and had us ride it. It was fairly messy as things came up very quickly, but we got through it and gave us things to work on more, including the halfpass, as those were fairly lousy. Lendon had me start a half pass and then switch to a bad leg yield, and back to half pass. Her reaction to one of the leg yields was, "That's terrible, I love it!" which made me laugh. The point of the exercise was to be able to maintain more bend in the halfpass. We also worked on the canter centerline X halt, which Scooby and I had never done. Most of them were crooked or had a walk step, but some were okay, and they can only get better, right?

Overall the TEAM clinic experience was -once again- amazing. Everytime I ride with Lendon I learn so much from my rides, the lectures, and watching the other riders. Thanks to everyone who makes the clinics happen; they are such wonderful learning opportunities.