

With support from the Dressage4Kids Scholarship program I was able to participate in the first Dressage4OldKids Clinic October 5-9, 2021 at Pineland Farms in New Gloucester, Maine. I brought my 7 year old Halflinger/Dutch Harness Horse mare, Lacey, to the clinic. Lacey and I have been competing First level all summer and we are now trying to achieve the balance and strength to compete at second level in 2022.

These are a few of my favorite exercises from the clinic;

On the first day of the clinic Lendon had us do a counter canter exercise that really helped my mare gain confidence and a greater degree of balance

Lacey can get a little quick and unbalanced in counter canter, so in this particular exercise, Lendon had us pick up left lead, go across the short diagonal and begin on a 20m circle in the middle of the arena. While on the 20m circle in counter canter, each time we would cross the centerline on the 20m circle we did a 10m circle to the left. This 10m circle acts as a chance to rebalance and organize the horse before continuing on the second half of your 20m counter canter circle.

This exercise helped give Lacey the time to be comfortable and build confidence in counter canter, but also the chance to rebalance and have a little break on the 10m circle portion of the exercise.

Exercise to improve walk pirouette:

To keep the feeling of the horse being wrapped around your inside leg and to keep good quality control with the inside leg, Lendon had me start a walk pirouette, and when I felt that Lacey was leaning on and no longer listening to my inside leg, she had me leg yield Lacey away from my inside leg so that I could keep control over the bend and quality of the pirouette with my inside leg. The exercise went a little like this; 2-3 steps of pirouette, leg yield 3-4 steps, 2-3 pirouette steps, 3-4 steps of leg yield, and repeat until the pirouette felt a little more controlled and my inside leg was effective.

Another interesting visual that I quite like for Walk Pirouettes was; if there were cameras placed in front of your horse, taking pictures as you stepped around your walk pirouette, your horse should look like he is in a little shoulder-fore the entire time around your pirouette.

For the horse that gets rolling along and fast at canter;

Begin by trotting (in this case tracking left) down the long side, at A turn down the centerline, leg-yield from the centerline to E or V, once you reach the wall pick up canter, canter a half of a 20m circle, once you are straight on the track again, transition to trot and repeat the exercise.

This exercise is helpful for horses who get strong and fast in canter, but also those who get tense when they come back to trot and were anticipating going back to canter. The leg-yield acts as a good "distraction" and gives the horse something to do, while getting him to engage his hindlegs before asking for the canter again.