



Clinic with Betsy Steiner

Over the winter, I was fortunate to have been awarded a scholarship to further my training with Perlita. Perlita is a 13 year old PRE pony mare, who I lease from Dressage4Kids. I typically take 2 lessons per week, and the scholarship would allow me to increase my lessons to 3-4 times each week. We had hoped to develop the strength and balance needed to compete at the FEI Children's level. Unfortunately, as with many others, our plans were sidetracked by the coronavirus.

At the start of our time with extra lessons, we were mainly working on getting a "go" button quicker, getting Perlita more supple, and getting her rounder through forward. Some exercises we did to help do these things were letting her go forward around the entire arena then doing spiral-in and spiral-out on a circle to get her more supple. We also worked on adjustability in the gaits by riding a few strides bigger, then a few strides smaller. There were some frustrating days as Perlita can be balky at times and opinionated, like a pony mare can be. However, we were making progress and had lots of great moments.

I had the opportunity to ride my trainer's Intermediaire 1 mare. The goal was to help teach me how light my aids should be, to help my position, and to help me become aware of how much I was gripping with my legs unnecessarily.. She was very sensitive to slight aids and I was able to feel how loose I could keep my legs and influence the shoulders of the horse better, which helped me with trying to be more sensitive as a rider on Perlita.

COVID-19 detoured the training plans, and I was unable to ride away from home for a month, however my trainer continued to ride her. While Perlita was being ridden only by my trainer, she developed a smaller canter (which is HUGE for her because she used to speed around the arena). The dedicated professional training time helped Perlita to get stronger and be more balanced and when I was able to ride her again, I was able to start gaining control over the tempo of her gaits better.



Lesson in Spring

Once the quarantine restrictions eased up, I was able to return to lessons several days a week. I worked on keeping Perlita chasing the bit by asking her to stretch forward and downward and asking her to use her hind legs and back correctly by using my seat and half halting. Keeping Perlita balanced can sometimes be challenging, as she likes to run on her forehand and be fast and quick. I know that I need to keep myself more even, balanced, and relaxed, as I tend to tip forward and lean right. Perlita and I have encountered an issue with her stopping... then refusing to move. We have tried multiple strategies, and this is still a work in progress. Some days are great, others are a struggle. I need to work on my own body to ensure that I am setting Perlita up for success. Picking up the left lead is challenging for me, as I lean forward and to the right. I need to sit back more and sit in my left seatbone more, and also ensure that Perlita is straight on the outside, and I ask her with a seat aid to pick up the canter. I have a tendency to do too much with my body, which causes some confusion for Perlita.



Fix-A-Test in spring

In June, I had the opportunity to ride with Betsy Steiner. I worked on keeping my hands down, soft, and steady. Continuing to work on little trot and little canter to keep Perlita balanced. We worked on shoulder-in and baby haunches in, keeping her steady. We did some leg yielding and baby halfpass. We practiced walk-canter and canter-trot-walks, focusing on the timing of asking just before the outside hind leg touches the ground, as that is the first step of canter. We did canter-trot-walk since canter-walks typically cause Perlita to stop, so we do as few steps possible of trot in between. Betsy helped Perlita to become a little more supple and soft in the bridle. We

had worked with Betsy a few times previously, and I was so happy that Betsy commented on how much we had improved since the last time she saw us.



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Perlita and I are excited to be participating in the Summer Intensive Program in Maine this year so that we can continue with our training. Thank you to Lendon Gray, Dressage4Kids and the Scholarship committee for supporting Perlita and I on our journey!