

Connection and Collection

2017 Scholarship Essay

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I would like to give a heartfelt thank you for enabling me to partake in the Gerrit-Claes Bierenbroodspot Riding Clinic. The feelings I created from my horse, Tigger, were incredible. However, I could not have experienced these feelings without Claes' instruction. The Claes Clinic was held at Trio Farm in New Gloucester, Maine – the home of my trainer Karen Folan – a long term student of Claes. The riding clinic was held over the course of two days.

On day one Claes took a few minutes to analyze both me and my horse. Tigger is a 9 year old Irish Sport Horse, that I have owned and worked with for the past 11 months. He came to me with very basic flatwork, which has progressed competitively and competently through to First Level. Next season we are planning to move up to show at Second Level. After a few minutes of analysis from Claes, we got right down to work. Claes always said to start with the side of the horse where you can gain the most access. We used several simple lateral movements like leg yielding, shoulder fore, and haunches in, that would promote engagement in the hind leg, while maintaining straightness. In the canter we strived to develop the engagement and impulsion. Then on the small circle we started to develop a collected canter. We ended the one hour lesson with some light collection and uphill connection work.

The following day we warmed up with the same lateral exercises to work through any long downhill frame and stiffness. The work we had done the day before set us up to advance further. It took me less time to gain the same feelings of solid connection as the day before. As we transitioned away from the lateral work we looked in more depth at the canter. As before we used a small circle and concentrated on keeping a forward momentum while moving Tigger around the circle with my outside aids and an opening inside rein. After working on the circle for some time, we took the canter we had developed onto the straight lines. The lesson's end result was a trot that showed the very first signs of collection maintaining an uphill connection and engagement that was consistent throughout all of our work.

Claes is a very effective trainer and clinician who is always honest and ready to do what is necessary for both the rider and the horse to understand his instruction and be successful. I learned so much over the course of the clinic and gained many new feelings and greater understanding about training a younger horse. I gained new exercises that are now tools I use regularly. Claes emphasized to me feeling and consistent training in order for true and everlasting improvement to be seen. I have been striving to build upon what I learned during the clinic throughout my training. Once again I would like to thank you for all your kind generosity!