

Report: Christain Kennedy Scholarship to work with Lars Petersen

Genevieve (Evie) Oliver

It was a crazy feeling, arriving home from the Florida season. My girls were certainly happy, as they finally had their lush grass paddocks back and were reunited with their long lost friends. They knew they were home. But for some reason, Florida still felt like my home. Three months of living there, including all of the amazing moments and many difficult ones, felt like years. It took at least a week for me to readjust to being back in Pennsylvania (of course, the freezing cold that greeted me was unhelpful in the endeavor). All in all, the 2022 Florida season was the best 3 months of my life. Since I am on my gap year, other than one college class I was taking virtually, I was able to devote every part of myself to what I loved: dressage and the care of my girls.

Every day was structured very similarly. I would wake up, take care of my girls, clean the eleven stalls of the barn, and then I had time to ride before cleaning stalls again from 3-5pm. Pretty much every day I had an outing with one of them, which was incredibly good for them. Most of the time, these outings were for lessons with Lars Petersen. Having the opportunity to work with him twice a week made a huge difference this season. I never had the chance to get into a bad habit with either of my girls because he had his eye on them so frequently and could address it immediately. This was incredible to me, as back home I am usually only able to get lessons once every two weeks. Every other weekend I would show at Global. Lars and Melissa were incredible about this. I didn't have a trainer at the time, so to school me at shows, Lars and Melissa put me on their schedule and helped me in any way they could. This was huge for me, as the most important way that I changed in Florida was how I test ride in the arena. Before this season, I would say I really rode the test about 50% of the time I went into the ring. The other 50%, my nerves got the better of me and impacted my ability to think through things as they came up in the test, which is of course a problem in dressage, as the majority of the sport is with

the brain, not the body. Showing every other weekend in the charged environment of Global, and having either Lars's or Melissa's eyes on the ground to keep me riding, improved this immensely. I haven't had the feeling that I lost my ability to problem solve during a test since the beginning of the season.

Of course, while this loose structure held true for the majority of the days in Florida, there were differences as well. In the first couple weeks of getting down there, I had the amazing opportunity to participate in the Robert Dover Horsemastership clinic. While this was not part of the scholarship, I will still outline everything I learned from this incredible experience, as I know how involved D4K is with it.

With horses, you know nothing will ever be easy. I ran into a lot of problems and for the first time, I had to learn to deal with them myself. A couple days before the RDHC, the horse I had applied with (Shading) was lame. Her left fetlock was extremely inflamed. I contacted a vet, and did continuous ice/wrap cycles until he was able to make it out (which was just a couple hours thankfully). Unfortunately, he wasn't able to figure out what was wrong, so she was put on stall rest, bute, and he came back in a few days. This was the day before the clinic, and she was completely sound. Although it was still a mystery, he cleared me to go to the clinic (a relief!). However, the first day of the clinic, she was lame again, and I had to give up my lesson with George Williams. Luckily, thanks to the amazing people running the clinic, they allowed me to switch her out with my other mare, Shiloh. The next three days I was able to ride Shiloh with George and on Sunday ride our first test together in the CDI ring at global (which was an incredible experience). I am so grateful that it worked out the way it did, as the clinic was incredibly important for my journey with Shiloh towards Young Riders. Of course, we got Shading home and immediately called a vet out again. Luckily, he believed she just knocked it on something in the paddock and we should just give it more time. Sure enough, in another couple days she was back to her perfectly sound self again. Good timing Shading.

Fast forward two weeks, and Shiloh's left front now swells up. It was a couple days before my first show ever with her. Again, vets were not sure what was up. After a week of hand walking, wrapping, poulticing, and icing, she was sound again. While I missed the show, I was able to put her back into work and debut her at Global 5. She only improved after that.

I rode both of these girls with Lars, typically each would get a lesson a week. I was showing Shading at fourth level and in the meantime starting to play with some of the PSG work (she is 8 years old this year). Shiloh had been doing PSG for half a year, and I had been riding her for two months, so we were learning about each other along with working towards qualifying for Young Riders. I learned an incredible amount on both of them. Below I will talk about some exercises Lars had me doing, tips on riding the tests, and I'll add in some things from the RDHC in Shiloh's list.

Shading:

Canter Pirouettes: I played a lot with these on Shading because she is short backed so collection is quite easy for her. She would instead have trouble as she gets anxious learning new things, so when I asked for the turn she would come behind me and then get confused and switch leads. It was critical for me to really sit into her, imagine pedaling my legs back to encourage this seat, in order to be with her and help her from being confused.

Half steps/Piaffe: I really wanted to play with this because I am hoping to train Shading up to Grand Prix so that I can do U25. While she is naturally quite talented at the piaffe and passage, I have not done a lot with her yet so I know it is important to focus on that as I continue moving her up. Lars had me start at the trot and then bring her back further and further. It is important for her to keep her hind legs going but really take the front legs small as they have a tendency to become exaggerated like a passage. After a couple good steps we would go back to collected trot, and then try again.

Connection: I have struggled a lot with Shading in the connection, as she likes to put her poll low to evade the contact and then her shoulders are unable to make her beautiful natural movement. I worked a lot with both Lars and Melissa at the shows to really ride the hind legs up into the contact and let her come up and out. This has changed absolutely everything for the quality of our work.

Shiloh:

Lars:

Canter pirouettes: This was the main thing I worked on with Lars on Shiloh. She is long backed, so it is hard for her to get her hind legs up under her and quicken in the collection. We did a lot of transitions within the canter, going forward and then bringing her back into a pirouette-like canter in order to build up her muscles for the collection. Once we were able to do these transitions well, we started doing small quarter turns. It was important for me to really sit in the saddle, as when Shiloh struggled she had a tendency to bounce up in the back, throwing me out of the tack and of course that didn't encourage her to collect up under.

Notes on the YR Individual test: as you are turning into the second shoulder-in from going straight across the arena, push the haunches out so that you can be positioned correctly as quickly as possible. Think extended in the mediums along the short diagonals. Do not lose the extension halfway across the diagonal in either trot or canter. When you get to the middle, think push. Move the horse into the new outside rein slightly before each tempi change. Half halt right after the change and then go forward into the next change.

RDHC:

For the canter pirouette: Canter in a 15 meter circle in a haunches in. Be able to go from the canter to a walk, and a walk into the canter, spiral into a smaller circle, etc. The inside bend and the quickness of the outside hind leg of the horse are critical. Sometimes it helps with this to start with haunches-in on the long side in the canter. Work a lot on transitions into and out of a

pirouette canter on the long side. It really helps to know how much you can collect your horse, cause it may surprise you! As George says, "find what the limits are."

For the tempi changes: The half half during/right before the change is very important, as well as moving the horse into the new outside rein using the new inside leg before the change.

All in all, this was the most incredible experience. I learned so much and I was so honored to be riding in Christain's name. I evolved so much as a rider throughout the season, and it would not have been possible without this scholarship. Thank you so much Lendon and D4K for providing these for the youth of this sport. It really means everything.