

I was lucky enough to receive a Dressage4Kids scholarship to attend the Lendon Gray clinic at Highclere Farm in Burlington NC. It was a wonderful weekend of learning in many different areas of horsemanship.

The clinic began Friday evening with a lovely presentation from NCDCTA Vice President, Helen Ingersol. She explained wonderfully how NCDCTA would not be possible without the generosity of volunteers. She also explained the many ways to get involved with our local GMO, something I hope to be able to do this season.

Saturday morning started bright and early with a fitness session by Ali-Perkins Latorre. I really enjoyed her presentation on relating different exercises to the training scale we use in our riding. Ali said it best, "you cannot expect your horse to be fit and go well without yourself being fit." I especially enjoyed working on the rubber balance balls. It is definitely harder than it looked.

During lunch we had a beautiful presentation on putting together a musical freestyle by Emme Johnston. I have never attended such an in-depth presentation on how to find your horse's beats per minute, as well as music phrasing. I also loved her explanation on copyright with the music used, as it has always been very intimidating. Her presentation left me with many pointers that I will definitely be using in the creation of my one freestyles.

Saturday evening I had a wonderful ride on my eleven-year-old Percheron Cross Gelding named Darby. We worked very hard to get him up in front of me with a little "jazz". To do this Lendon had us do a wonderful exercise of pushing him forward and then bringing him back. All of this was performed while keeping my hands up (as I like to ride with them low and Darby loves to lean on them) and having mini vibrations in my ring fingers to help him find relaxation. This exercise allowed me to unlock my arms and elbows to help Darby find his natural carriage. I no longer had to hold his head up!

Sunday morning started bright and early as well with a presentation on chiropractic from Nicole Hamilton. It was very informative to hear about chiropractic from another professional's perspective. I loved how she used a horse to help demonstrate proper stretching and range of motion that we can all do to benefit our horses.

I then had a wonderful ride on my horse, working much on the same ideas as Saturday, but in a more forward manner and beginning to put much of the work into movements. By then, I really felt my horse was going freely forward without me giving him "a shelf to lean on." Lendon greatly helped me improve my posture to influence my horse.

I finished the clinic by attending a presentation on the updated USDF rules by Janie Malone. It was a lovely discussion from an official's perspective. She clarified many of the questions that we as competitors have always wanted to ask. We will all be better prepared for this upcoming show season thanks to this question and answer forum.

Finally, I want to thank all the organizers, presenters, especially Lendon, Ali, and Nicole for a wonderfully organized clinic. Everyone was so welcoming and helpful. I enjoyed getting to know new people and reconnecting with familiar faces. I can't wait to put into practice all that was learned this weekend.

Sydney Langley



