

Fall 2022 University of Connecticut Dressage Team
Dressage4Kids Scholarship Report

Tryouts
9 September 2022

I did not have to try out again this year, but I volunteered for the whole tryouts. Most of the day was holding horses or stewarding.

Tryouts
10 September 2022
Assigned Horse: Excalibur

I tried out for the Equestrian Team too, which is jumping. I only rode for about five minutes but the horse I rode is a good little nugget. He is usually very slow but he likes shows so he did a good job.

Lesson 1
16 September 2022
Assigned Horse: Sherman

Sherman came to UConn last year and he had great expectations. He was donated to us with the glowing recommendation and flying experience. He was approximately some age with high schooling and eventing background. When we saw what he can actually do, it was unclear what he actually did. We know he showed up to second level and is a smart dressage horse. Last year, one of our seniors rode Sherman often and he looked fabulous, so I was excited to draw him.

Sherman is not an easy ride; he really challenges you to ride the outside of a horse. He is very stiff and slams his feet down but when he comes into frame, he is marvelous. I was warned that he would be very difficult, but I've ridden some difficult horses at UConn, and no one is quite as rewarding as Sherman when he goes nice. He takes a strong seat and outside aid. I've never done much counter bending on horses on purpose since most of the time I have to correct horses from falling out.

I really must pay attention to him because he puts his head up and it feels like you're straddling a pool noodle in the water. You must counter bend him and then flex him into the inside and it was so confusing to understand at first but once I learned how to push Sherman's buttons he comes into frame and will self-carry nicely.

I struggle with steering when I counter bend because I find it hard to work so strongly on one side without losing the other side. I was struggling to get his canter depart in a serpentine exercise for our group lesson, but we did individual canter work, and it went very smoothly. I really would like to ride him again to get better at learning the outside aid.

Volunteer Event
18 September 2022

We went to Four Town Fair to assist at their horse show for Club Sports required community service hours. We had a group of six go for nine hours, I was a test runner for the hunter ring and helped set up and take down jumps.

Lesson 2

23 September 2022

Assigned Horse: Sherman

Boy do my thighs hurt! I was happy to ride Sherman again. He's so weird about his girth and saddle and is such a biter (explains why he was donated to us). He has a nice personality aside from his quirks. We had a great lesson today; we got every canter depart and I realized that in the last lesson I would often shove him forward and give away my outside rein which was his excuse to throw his head up. Since it's a group lesson, you either walk around when you're not being coached or do work, so I had to audibly say my aids out loud to remember to keep doing them when I wasn't being coached. I think it helped a lot since I was learning a new aid and really how to use a new part of my body since I don't often engage my lower thigh for the outside aid before.

Sherman had some really nice moments, and I was able to get him to carry himself around in frame at the walk and trot independently. Unfortunately, when I was put in the ring to do my test (not my regular test, I do Training 1 and it was Intro B), Sherman had his head up quite a lot. It's so embarrassing but I know I had some good moments when no one was looking. I like that I was able to ride him again and I think I fit him really well. Usually, I am assigned a short and stout Morgan where my lower leg is hanging off, so it was nice to have some complete contact with the whole horse. My legs are so sore already, but I really like Sherman.

Make-Up Lesson

27 September 2022

Assigned Horse: Emma

Today I'm joining one of the beginner intermediate lessons because I'm going home this Friday for my mother's breast cancer walk team. This lesson group is a bit below my riding level but it's always interesting to ride with a different instructor. There was a bigger focus on equitation in this lesson's exercises than the dressage horse and rider team we focus on in the UCDT lessons. I rode Emma last year and she is quite a good girl. She is so small compared to Sherman because Sherman is probably bigger than 16 hands and Emma is almost a pony. She is so compact, and she doesn't have Sherman's giraffe neck. Her working trot is such a different tempo than Sherman because she is quite short-strided but lands with her feet much lighter than Sherman. Sitting her trot is quite comfortable because I don't feel her shoulder slamming into my thigh. She really needs a lot of inside leg to keep her from falling in at the shoulder. She is very tippy and needs so much support I feel like I'm scooping ice cream with my inside rein to keep her from nose-diving into the middle of the arena. She is a great ride and so different from the horses I've been riding lately. She isn't in good shape so once she has her first right lead canter, she gets very stiff, and I had to ride in two point for a portion of our exercise to keep the quality of her canter. She wasn't in full work over the summer, so she is just getting her condition back. I still liked her and perhaps the next time I ride her I'll have shorter stirrups because my heels were hanging off of her. We were doing some transition work with "stop in the box" exercises and canter circles and she would often break into the trot. This lesson instructor was asking me to drive her with my seat and I watched a Shelly Francis clinic where she would ask every rider if they were "driving" and I learned not to do it. I feel like there is a time and place for any aid and I think I'm not entirely sure what driving is supposed to feel like since I was taught not to do it. I think I might have been digging my seat bones into her so she couldn't lift her back into the strides. Her tempo was so speedy that I might have been over-doing my "balance aids" and confusing her into thinking I wanted her to trot.

Conditioning Rides
29 September 2022
Requested Horse: Sherman

My parents ended up not going to the walk since the weather turned bad so I stayed on campus and went to this lesson since next week I will have to miss the lesson for my mother's birthday. Sherman is on the list for conditioning rides because he is primarily used for dressage, so he doesn't get ridden as consistently as the horses who are used by all the teams. I signed up to work with him so I could have more time outside of lessons to practice with him. He was very slow today and I was trying to get him in front of my leg and sometimes we have some good moments. I was able to get the canter depart in both directions but until he comes into frame it's difficult to feel if he's on the correct lead unless I look down at him because he slams his hooves down so hard. When you ride him right and he goes nice with self-carriage you can tell the quality of the canter is so improved. He's a great guy but difficult to ride. He really pushes you to learn how to use multiple aids at once and push him into contact. There's a lot going on at the same time and I must remember to give when he does what I ask. I'm grateful to Molly Maloney for letting me work with Flyboy because he was really the first horse I've ever consistently ridden unsupervised (my independent study last year was supervised so I would occasionally get feedback) and Flyboy made me as a rider have to depend on myself to know how my horse was feeling and be able to determine on my own how the ride was going. I had Sherman do a lot of bending work so I could really learn his buttons for that "counter-bend" and "ride the outside" aids. He's very good with lateral work but when I do lateral work I'm not used to counter bending at the canter and I find I lose my ability to maintain my geometries.

Lesson 3
30 September 2022
Assigned Horse: Sherman

I found Sherman online under his registered name Harmonicat. He was a racing thoroughbred but only had three starts. In one of them he came in dead last which doesn't surprise me one bit since he tends to be quite lazy. I think he is very smart and does that because he thinks he can get away with it but maybe he just isn't built for speed. If you use the whip on him, he acts like he got shot but he also has mild kissing spines which is why he was donated to us. Today was not my best ride. I think I was tired since I rode three times this week and I was out of my summer condition. I really spent the summer in pretty good shape since I would work from 7-am until I was done and then ride Flyboy if someone was at the barn. I used to have 10–12-hour days between work and riding and then I went to nothing to once a week lessons. I feel bad because I don't think I gave Sherman my best effort and I started to feel very out of breath and lightheaded at the end of the ride and had to get off to cool him out. I wish my lessons were in the morning instead of 5:30 at night. I heard a lot of unfortunate comments about me today which kind of ruined my night, but it wasn't Sherman's fault. He was very behind the leg today and I just didn't have the energy to really get him going. I think I've been playing the bit a little too quickly because when I flexed his mouth slower, he would go into frame smoother, and we had some good walk to trot transitions. That was probably the best part of the lesson. He really needs to be pressed forward into the contact and I'm glad I realized a better way to ask him to do that. The thing with him though, is when he succeeds it's so rewarding that even a bad ride doesn't make me want to stop riding him. I just wish I could go home and ride my schooling horse to practice so I don't embarrass myself in front of the team during lessons.

Conditioning Rides

6 October 2022

Requested Horse: Sherman

Sherman was such a little bum today. I rode with a short crop, and he seemed to get the idea but was terribly behind my leg. We had some mediocre canter. I had set up a triangle with poles that would operate as an exercise you could approach straight, on a circle, or a figure eight to help with Sherman engaging his legs into a bigger working trot. I spent twenty minutes setting up the exercise just to get into the arena and see other riders took it apart and only left out three poles on the straightway. Regardless, Sherman and I still used them, and I think they really help him pick up his feet instead of slamming them down and shortening his back. We didn't have a great quality canter, but I was happy to see him having an improved trot. I'd be curious to see how Sherman would do the triangles exercise. In the beginning I would have to strongly encourage Sherman to get over the poles instead of standing on top of them, but I think having some change in arena scenery is good for him. I really like pole work and I think you make a lot out of a fancy pattern or a simple pattern so at least I was able to make the most out of the exercises.

Lesson 4

7 October 2022

Absent for my mother's birthday down state.

Conditioning Rides

13 October 2022

Requested Horse: Sherman

I think I have all of Sherman's ducks, but they are not in a row. We started the session off with Sherman spooking at literally nothing and charging away. He was fine and at least it gave him a wake up call. Today I was able to get a good canter with forward momentum and maintenance of a decent frame. I was able to keep the canter without him breaking into trot and keep the canter quality good. The only thing is I was only able to get him into the depart from a walk. I think I expect him not to canter from the trot so there's something I'm doing that isn't working out. When I ask from the walk, I push him into a frame with my legs and ask for a little leg yield step and then ask for the canter and he'll go into it smoothly. When I ask for the depart from the trot, he shoots off into an unbalanced gait with his head in the air. I can get a good walk to trot transition, and I think doing a lot of transitions in the warmup trot to one step of walk to directly into the trot again makes him more alert to my leg pressure. Once he really gets going, he actually gets a little hot which is very nice and not dissimilar from Flyboy. He is like Flyboy in that he'll take forever to get from the barn to the arena.