

Saskia Berrios-Thomas
Moray Nicholson Clinic 2015

This was the first set of clinics that I have taken on my new horse, Duncan. We have been to two shows so far: the Youth Dressage Festival, and a small schooling show. We have been showing training level. I've only had Duncan for 3 months, but I've learned so much. I've ridden with Mr. Nicholson before, and I was very excited to take clinics with my new horse, the first I've ever owned.

We focused a lot on teaching Duncan the basics. The thing Mr. Nicholson stressed the most was that I need to build a strong, solid foundation for Duncan to ensure that all of his future training is correct. Duncan had only ever done trail riding before I bought him, so dressage is very new to him. He has picked up on things very fast, though. When I bought him he didn't know his leads and now he gets them reliably. But Mr. Nicholson wanted to focus on making sure that Duncan understood how to do the foundational elements of dressage.

We worked the most on keeping a consistent rhythm. This is the foundation of the dressage training scale, and Mr. Nicholson emphasized its importance. We also worked on some transitions, and Mr. Nicholson said that at this point, it is important for Duncan to simply understand how to move smoothly between the 3 gaits and how to halt. We worked on large figures like 20 meter circles, diagonals, squares, and going on the long side so that it was easy for Duncan to maintain his rhythm.

Duncan still gets pretty rushed in his canter, and Mr. Nicholson said that is ok. His trot work is pretty solid in terms of its tempo, but he sometimes runs in the canter. Mr. Nicholson said that I should only canter for as long as Duncan is able to hold a good, balanced, rhythmic canter, even if that is only for 4 strides. We worked on getting this good canter and then rewarding Duncan. Mr. Nicholson said this is what I need to work on over the winter in order to

make sure Duncan builds up his strength for future work. He emphasized how important this foundation is, and my trainer has been talking to me about this a lot as well. I am looking forward to spending the winter working on his basic dressage work.

On the second day of our clinic, we began to play with a few lateral movements. Mr. Nicholson said it was important to introduce these slowly and to not push Duncan since he is very new to dressage. He leg yielded in the walk and trot and also did a bit of shoulder-fore and shoulder-in. Mr. Nicholson said that as I work on Duncan's foundation, I could add in some of these movements to improve his strength and balance. In addition, Duncan seemed to enjoy the lateral work and he moves easily off the leg, so it was nice to be able to do something that he enjoys and is good at.

We finished our second day by again working on some of the canter work. Mr. Nicholson said that it is important that I be very patient with the canter and that I don't push him. He stressed again that I should only canter for as long as Duncan is able to hold a good canter, because there is no point in maintaining an unbalanced canter.

I learned a lot in these clinics and I had fun learning with my horse. I rode one of my previous lease horses up to third level and I sometimes get anxious to move Duncan up, especially because he is so talented. Mr. Nicholson really emphasized that I should not push Duncan, and that laying that foundation is very, very important for our future. I have taken this on as a challenge and a learning experience and I am looking forward to spending the winter working on rhythm, relaxation, and regularity so that we can have a solid framework for the rest of our dressage work.