

JJ Tate Clinic - 2021

Sydney Dayken

On September 11th and 12th, I had the fantastic opportunity to ride in a clinic with international dressage competitor and trainer JJ Tate. This was made possible by the generosity of Dressage4Kids. I took Roo, a 20-year-old Morgan Mare that I have been riding for about 2 ½ years. Roo and I had a fabulous time and made so much improvement in just two rides.

JJ had me focus on helping Roo bring her right hind leg more under herself during our lessons. She showed us a beneficial exercise: moving from shoulder-in on a 20-meter circle to shoulder-out, staying on the circle. We used this to get Roo to lift her right hind up and under herself and sink into her joints.

The overall focus of my rides was effectively using my seat to coach Roo's back and help her loosen up and become completely round over her topline. At the canter, JJ brought up the "Swivel Seat," which is a tool she talks about in her Team Tate Academy. We then brought that feeling into the trot and got some beautiful moments of power and throughness.

JJ's way of teaching is so special, and there are a few quotes from the clinic that really stuck out to me;

- "Good riders react. Great riders prevent."
 - JJ noticed that I am good at reacting quickly when Roo isn't responding exactly how I would like. She urged me to practice becoming less reactive with my aids and more preventative.
- "I help you be round, I help you be round, I help you be round."
 - Branching off from the previous quote, JJ used this to help me feel what it is like to prevent Roo from bracing above the bit. A constant but very soft and fluid movement of the wrists or fingers is a reminder to Roo to stay relaxed in the contact.
- "Leg, to the seat, to the hand, to the mouth."
 - JJ remarked that many people have the idea of using the "leg to the mouth," but they skip over their seat, thus breaking the circle of energy. As JJ repeated this in the rhythm of the canter, I did my best to feel it. Once I did, Roo came over her back and into a beautifully round and powerful canter. What a great feeling!

JJ Tate has such a vivid way of instructing, and I felt that it meshed very well with my way of learning. In addition, her sense of humor makes her such a joy to be around. I had such a fantastic experience, and I have Dressage4Kids to thank for it!