

Clinic with Anne Gribbons

By Jessica Fan

How does one ride effectively? This is one of the major difficulties for every rider because there is a standard to ride effectively that we all aim for but each horse and rider has different issues that hold them back from attaining that standard. To me, riding effectively means the ability of a rider to communicate to the horse in a way in which the horse understands what the rider wants. This is difficult to achieve since each horse has its own thought process and can translate something differently. However, for trainer Anne Gribbons, effective riding is not a question, but a goal to achieve. Riding with Anne, I got to experience this first hand.

There were two things that Anne stressed: the rider's position and a good half halt.

The first thing that Anne told me after watching my warm up is that I was a beautiful rider, but that most riders do not understand that every little thing the rider does will affect the horse. The one thing that she asked me to fix was my shoulder position (which I tend to round) which detracted from the overall picture. She stressed that the upper body is the key to good riding as it allows the energy to flow through the rider in an uninterrupted flow. After making this adjustment (and Anne instilling in me the mental image of her chasing me with an ice pick), I found that my core could plug in and I could work more harmoniously with my horse. Just pulling back my shoulders allowed me to use a different part of my core and to not give up my position to the horse. It also helped me to sit in a stabilized position with their elbows down at my side and to move with the motion of the horse rather than trying to find the horse's motion. With this adjustment, I found that my horse was more willing to move forward into my hand with a round back. The next part was establishing a good half halt to compress all of this new forward movement.

The half halt is the increasing of the flexion of the hip and hock joints of the hind leg that allow the horse to round its back and come into self-carriage without losing impulsion. For Anne, the concept of a half halt was simple: to press my inside leg on the horse to connect him to the outside rein, and then to tighten my core as I apply the half-halt to the outside rein. The concept was simple, but it illuminated that my horse was not properly on my aids as he threw his head into the air. Having a forward horse is not the same as a horse listening to the leg. The first thing Anne had me do is run through exercises to get my horse moving off of my leg. One of the key exercises she had me do was a leg yield in different variations such as: leg yield directly across the arena, leg yield from the corner to X and then straighten to a lengthening, leg yield in and out of a circle, leg yield from the quarter line to the wall to a volte then back to quarter line, and even a leg yield in the canter. Anne chose the leg yield because it gets the horse into the outside aids. Once established, a half halt applied correctly gets the horse to lower the haunches and flex in the hock and stifle. This introduced a new level of my horse's trot as we took him from a second level frame to a more cadenced trot.

Riding with Anne was an amazing experience and I greatly appreciate Lendon Gray and Dressage 4 Kids for helping to sponsor me for this clinic. Also, a big thank you to Dawn Chamorro of Isabella Farms for hosting.