

Winter Intensive Training Program 2021

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I have been back from Florida for a couple of weeks now just trying to process this winter with Lendon. I am so thankful for the opportunity that I was given. I arrived in Wellington Friday, January 1st with Cracker. Cracker is a 15 year old Morgan pony that stands 14.2 hands. I felt so honored that I had the opportunity to take on this journey with him. After getting all settled in, I arrived back at the barn on Saturday morning for feed and turnout and to tour the facility. WIT was hosted at Roseview Farms, and wow was it amazing! Judy and David Sloan were very generous to allow us to have the program there.

Saturday evening we had a meeting with Lendon, and all the other WITees and their parents. We met the barn manager, Meagan along with Lendon's assistant, Alicia. I have to say that it was very overwhelming for me because I was a bit in shock that I was in Wellington and about to start this program that I had been dreaming about for years! Sunday was official and we all started together as a group. WIT ran Tuesday through Sunday with Monday as the "day off." Monday we had partners and we would alternate morning and evening chores with our partner so we only were spending a few hours at the barn caring for our horses. A typical day started at 7:00 a.m. where we all met out front of the barn and waited for everyone to arrive. The purpose of this was so all the horses were able to get fed at once, and go over anything important before splitting off to start the day.

Cracker was stabled in a little shed row that was away from the main barn and had a neighbor named, Nyx. Nyx and Cracker became pretty attached because they were out there alone and Nyx's owner, Emma and I also became very close. We came up with a good system for our ponies and were always willing to help each other out.

After feeding Cracker, I always recorded information into his daily log every morning. I would write down the date, his temperature, water intake, what his stall looked like, his behavior and what his workload was that day. This was in case if there was a day where he was off I was able to look back into his daily log and see when things started to change. After Cracker finished his grain, I always tried to turn him out for a bit before my lesson. At home Cracker is used to 8 hour day turnout, so it is important that he can get out during the day.

Lessons typically ran in the mornings between 8 and 1 with Lendon. Most of the lessons were semi-privates, but occasionally we would ride in groups or someone would get the opportunity for a private lesson. My lessons consisted of Lendon having me work on basic suppleness and throughness in the beginning and always telling me to get his neck longer and lower. She would constantly tell me, "you can never get his neck too low." Within the first couple of weeks of working with Lendon, she told me her goal for Cracker and I was to be at 4th level if not schooling Prix St. George by the time the three months were over. I thought she was out of her mind honestly, but I knew that I just had to trust the process and know that Lendon would help me every step of the way. Sure enough when I finished the program, I had competed at 4-3 and was working towards PSG.

Two outside clinicians came in that I had the opportunity to ride with. Liz Austin and Cesar Torrente came and I was very fortunate to be able to ride with them. Liz had me working on more to help be there for Cracker. With Cracker's personality, he is a bit of a firecracker at

times and I have to work really hard on channeling his energy. Liz had me trying to establish each gait with my hips. In the walk she wanted me to allow my hips to “slide” more in the saddle to allow him to walk. Sometimes, Cracker has a tendency to jig and by allowing my hips to slide I was giving him more of a chance to open up his stride so he could walk. I was working a ton on shoulder-fore and to help with his straightness, especially tracking left. Liz helped me with my half-pass by getting him to be a little bit more expressive. She wanted me to encourage him to be a bit more active and ask him to step up and over, not just to the side. She also encouraged me to “sprinkle” in long and lows to continue encouraging the longer neck and stretching more throughout the ride.

While riding with Cesar, he was mainly focused on Cracker’s straightness. Before my ride with Cesar, I was struggling with picking up my right lead canter from the walk. Cesar expressed to me that it was because Cracker was straight in his body therefore, it was quite hard for him to jump forward into the transition. I worked a lot in that lesson riding shoulder-fore tracking left and riding more haunches in tracking right. Cesar suggested that I take a day where maybe I only walk, but I focus more on being able to move his haunches to the inside and then to the outside. This would help Cracker loosen up more and allow me to figure out how much I need to do to make him more supple and through.

Lendon wanted us to be able to ride dressage tests to practice. Every two weeks we had a schooling show at Roseview that was judged by at least an “r” judge. This was very helpful for Cracker and I because we did show at Global and so it was nice to be able to practice. One thing that I learned while riding these tests was that I needed to figure out as the rider how to make the adjustments that are needed to be made during the movements. After the test the judge was able to come out and talk to us about the good parts and the parts that need improvement. I found this to be very helpful to continue improving as a rider and my training.

My experience at Global was amazing! I competed in two different shows riding the 4th level tests. I scored in the low 60s. I was very pleased with my rides because it was my first time ever riding at that level. Not only did I get to experience Global as a competitor, but I helped fellow WITees at the show. I was able to experience being in the CDI barn and was a groom for support as well as stood by the warmup ring and would help pull the horse’s boots off and take the headset before going in the ring. Not only was I there for the actual show day, but I had the opportunity to go early in the morning to watch the warmups. This was very educational for me because I am a visual learner and was able to watch some of the top riders in the world.

Another part of this program were the lectures. Due to Covid we only had a few people that came in person for lectures, but we were lucky enough to have access to zoom. Some of the lectures that were given were learning how to stretch our horse before and after our rides, saddle fitting, and bridle fitting. We also learned a bit about careers in the equine industry like being an announcer at some of the top shows, an equine veterinarian as well as being a show manager. One of the zoom lectures that we had every two weeks was with Larrissa and she helped us learn about channeling our inner feelings like anxiety, nervousness, excitement, etc. This was very helpful especially with riding under outside instructors, showing and of course being away from home and in a new place.

We were able to get off the property a few times to watch other professionals ride and teach. We had the opportunity to visit Kevin Kohman and Devon Kane’s facility and watch them train. One horse was an older Grand Prix horse that was working to maintain his training at

Grand Prix. The other horse competed at Intermediare. This was very educational because they both explained what they were doing and what their goals were with each horse.

Another facility we visited was Poinciana Farm. This gave us the opportunity to watch Sabine Schut-Kery receive a lesson from Christine Traurig. This was an inspirational lesson to watch because Sabine is one of the top riders who is still improving her position. Christine had told her to drop her stirrups while doing her one tempis because it stabilized her more and that to me was very nice to hear. It was nice for Christine to address an issue that she thought could be improved especially by dropping her stirrups and Sabine was very willing and stated how much it helped her. Christine was able to explain what she was having Sabine do and why, which was very helpful.

We had the opportunity to visit Halgstrand Dressage which is a sales barn. Amanda, the woman who was riding the sales horses had a lesson and we had the opportunity to watch. We learned that these horses received very good training and they worked hard to help clients find the horse that best fit the clients wants and needs. Marcus Fyffe Dressage was another facility we visited and they also gave a lesson. By watching different instructors giving lessons on different horses it was educational to see different styles as well as see how different instructors addressed different issues that each horse and rider. My favorite part about going and visiting these other facilities was being able to see the different layouts of the facility. I always like observing how others make their facility successful. I also really enjoyed that every instructor that we were able to audit, took the time to explain what the student was working on, their level/goals. Sometimes if the horse or the rider had a trouble spot they would explain the issue and how they might go about it to continue their training.

Last but not least, WIT also included fitness into the program. This was very helpful of course to build our muscles to be in shape for our horses, but it also helped bond our group together. With Covid, we as a group weren't able to meet up after the program to just get dinner and learn about each other the other groups did in the past. Not only did we do fitness, but we would find team building exercises that would help develop relationships with each other. There were ages between 12 and 24 in this group, and it was important that we all could feel comfortable around each other and form a community and it did not matter the age no the amount of experience or level on had. I thought that this was very helpful and definitely helped us grow together.

WIT was an amazing experience and not only did I improve my riding, but I became more educated off the horse. I developed skills that will help me communicate to others, become a better horseman, and learn more about how important growing a community in this sport really is. I have gained lots of new friendships that I hope to last a lifetime. I was very thankful for this opportunity and very thankful for Lendon and how much she pushed me both on and off the horse. Lendon was very encouraging for me to go out of my comfort zone and grow not only as an individual, but also as a horseman.