

The Winter of Windel

(otherwise known as 50 First Dates)

Coming into the winter of 2021 I was not sure what to expect because the horse that I was leasing was new to me. Every ride was like a first date. I did know a few things though that he was an extremely accomplished dressage horse with an extensive show history. The biggest thing to consider was that he was an older horse coming back into work. One of the challenges was finding a good bit for Windel to use. We had to go through three different bits before we decided the double bridle was the best option for him but at first we were trying to keep it simple and listen to Windel's opinion. Since I was in a full time training program we were able to start working on lots of things during my lessons. In these lessons we worked on things like leg yield and shoulder in and lateral work (we discovered haunches in is his favorite) to help him get loose through his body. For the first month we kept things kind of simple to improve his fitness and strength. During that time it's funny to look back at what I wrote because "improve his responsiveness to the leg" was important but as he became fitter and stronger it turned around to "I need to whisper the aides" in particular with the flying changes. He tends to want to rush his changes but I wasn't helping because I was giving too big of an aide. Getting control of every inch of Windel became a theme to my lessons along with getting control of myself. My trainers are always pushing for an independent seat and hand and I was reminded to ride with my hands out in front of me like I am carrying a plate in my hands. If Windel didn't like the contact he let me know by doing a really good Spanish Walk and we did a LOT of Spanish Walk the first month or so but now he doesn't do that very much or at all anymore. Reminders to work on my body position to keep it balanced helped Windel do his job. For example: looking straight ahead when doing

flying changes and not turning my eyes/head and body and instead using a slight change in my seat. Maintaining impulsion with my seat and hips and establishing collection from tightening your waist and core. I tend to lean to the inside when going left so remembering not to do that especially with a left flying change. We also started doing the beginnings of some canter pirouettes at that time by doing six and eight meter voltes.

Then because it was winter Windel slipped on the ice and strained his hock. So we took a pause and after he was better getting him back to work felt like starting all over again. We went back to trying to make him supple and stretch and even did some Pessoa work. But he ended up sound and strong and we started in the double bridle. That is when we started getting a little more serious in preparing for a third level test at a show. My trainers favorite exercise became: a figure eight on 20m circle with flying change going across the short diagonal from the top of the circle to the corner. We also did a lot of canter walk transitions on that 20m circle in addition to the flying change exercise. We have done a lot of those. We also started to use trotting poles so that way Windel would pick up his belly and feet. At first he was not very good at it but over time he got better and stopped clunking through them. Also during this time we worked a lot on getting better control of the outside rein and shoulders and used a lot of counter canter to true canter. Windel doesn't always like to pick up the right counter canter so if he got stuck my trainers had me move his shoulders towards the inside of the arena like in a fan shape and then ask again.

We did make it to our first show at Third Level 3 and I got to know Windel's personality at a show which at first he mostly seemed like he wanted to gallop back to the barn. By the second day he had settled in a lot more. I was really happy I got a 62.8 on the first day despite

Windel trying to leave at A midway through the test and a 64+ on the second test even though I had a course error (Windel did his job and that was my fault!).

Thanks to Dressage4Kids for awarding me the Bill Hamilton Scholarship. I learned quite a lot this winter and I think my riding really changed and I made a lot of progress. It was a big opportunity. I ended up taking a job at the barn I went for training (with Pierre and Samantha St Jacques) and I really enjoy working there as well as riding.