

Dressage4Kids members,

I write to you with extreme gratitude for the opportunity through the Dressage4Kids scholarship to attend part 1 of the USDF L Program. The amount of knowledge and understanding obtained will truly last a lifetime.

The program consisted of 3 sessions. Each session brought a new layer to all the things a judge has to balance in our now seemingly very quick dressage tests. As the rider they feel like a marathon, in the judges seat it feels like a sprint! The sessions were led by judges who are members of the L Faculty. Each leader brought their own perspective and tips that were much appreciated. I feel like I have insider info now! Each session we did one day in the classroom where you learned terminology and theory. The second day of each session some brave riders let us test out our new skills in live action. Questions that happened in the bubble of the classroom felt very different from those that arose in real life situations, so I am very thankful to Cadence Ranch and all the demo riders for giving us this opportunity.

After completing this portion of the program, I have a better understanding of the methodology a judge must adapt for every level. There are many components to composing a score and the training scale aligns with this thought process. So often we are concerned with the criteria of the movement and yes that is valuable, however without clear rhythm of each gait remarkable scores we strive for will never be obtained. I had a realistic understanding of this from a young age as Dressage4Kids WEP program often had judges to provide this insight (thank you Margaret!), however I not feel most lower level riders have a good understanding of this. If your pony is a 6 mover it is terribly challenging to get an 8 on a lot of movements. That being said this program put words to what I have worked on with many horses and that is what we call the "non brilliant" movements. These are movements that are not based on the quality of the gait and THOSE are where you could focus your energy on the obedient pony. Some non-brilliant movements include rein back and turn on the haunches.

This program provided many more helpful tips as a competitor and a trainer, too many to share in one journal entry! I very much encourage every competitor to find time to attend this course. In addition to the knowledge gained something far greater came from this experience, comradery. I met several judges, trainers, and riders alike. I now have gained fellow professionals to lean on and collaborate with. No one horse or rider was ever made great without a great team in their corner, and my corner has gained some wonderful people through this program and scholarship opportunity. I can proudly say I look forward to the challenge of part 2!

Sincerely,
Colleen Akin