

FEI Region 5 Youth Clinic w/George Williams, report by Bridget Kelly

Working with George Williams this past weekend at the USDF Region 5 FEI youth clinic was a wonderful experience! Our “focus” for the session was polishing our half-passes, something we have always struggled with, but George was so comprehensive in his approach that we ended up focusing more on the quality of the gaits, suppleness, and contact overall, and found that it wasn’t really the half-passes that were the problem, but finding a really *self-sustaining*, balanced trot and canter with the correct “dynamic” feeling of contact and better self-carriage. As we started warming up, George complimented my pony’s “natural cadence” and “nice frame,” but immediately recognized that she doesn’t truly carry herself, and he also reminded me that although cadence is nice, it can’t be the result of hesitant forward motion. We focused on encouraging her to feel comfortable in front of my leg while accommodating her and the trot we wanted with the feeling I established in the contact each stride; sometimes a little stronger feeling of contact to help her become rounder, sometimes giving her a little more freedom in the contact to use her body and move even more forward maintaining quality and cadence, but always “twice as much leg as hand.” He encouraged the use of a sharper leg aid rather than having to continuously use a more subtle aid, not to punish but to get her in front of the leg and again, if necessary, to remind her to be even more forward, followed by a pat to inform her that the aid was not intended as a reprimand. This way, she soon realized that she was expected to be very forward and in front of the leg, almost to an extreme point, and sustain it herself without continuous encouragement every single stride. We discovered that the main reason this issue presents itself most apparently in the half-pass is because of what occurs in the preparation before the actual half-pass: through the corner or turn before the half-pass, she gets behind my leg, which then manifests in the half-pass itself. To start to reverse this habit, George

instructed me to develop a medium trot immediately when we reach the wall at the end of the half-pass, again prioritizing a single, sharper aid and immediate response rather than allowing her to ignore my leg and take her time in transitioning to the medium.