

The main focus of my lessons during the dressage4kids clinic was to develop elasticity, develop fluidity between movements, and to work on ways to develop strength for improvement in canter pirouettes. I have a bit of a unique situation since I go to school about two hours away from the horse that I compete with, so I have very limited training time with her during the school year. During both of my lessons, Lendon emphasized that it was okay to make mistakes during the training process. This idea is very simple, however I believe that many people (including myself) fall into the fear of making mistakes. It was encouraging to be able to let the training process become a little ugly in order to see some progress. For example, allowing my horse to come above the bit in order for her to find a new balance in the collection for a canter pirouette.



During my first lesson, we mainly worked on making sure I had an adjustable horse. This mainly included simply moving my horse's body around to ensure she was supple and responsive to the aids. This included, haunches in at canter on the rail, haunches in at canter on the centerline (away from the rail), haunches in at canter on a circle, shoulder fore on the rail, shoulder fore on a diagonal, medium canter to collected canter transitions, counter canter, very collected ("pirouette") canter to collected canter transitions, half pass to leg yield transitions, and shoulder in to renvers transitions. It was honestly amazing to feel the difference in suppleness I had from the beginning of my ride to the end.

As a rider I tend to become very laser focused on performing certain movements. During my most recent rides since coming home for summer break, I have incorporated these adjustability exercises in both my rides and in some of the lessons that I have taught. I have noticed a huge difference in both the suppleness of my horse and in the fluidity between the movements.

During my second lesson, unfortunately my horse was very tense and reactive. While my original idea was to sort of "dumb down" my horse's gaits to get her more relaxed, Lendon encouraged me to put her to work instead. While we warmed her up, Lendon had me ride a series of walk, trot, canter transitions to develop more hind-end engagement. Next she incorporated some leg yielding, some half passes, and some giving and retaking of the reins (ie: stretchy contact to regular contact) to develop elasticity of her back. Lendon expressed the importance of being light on the horse's back while they are very tense, so all of the trot work was in rising trot.

Although these exercises did not completely make my horse relaxed, they did make her less explosive towards the aids and allowed us to work on high level movements.

We then were able to work towards trying a quarter pirouette turn. We did this by first working on transitions into a very collected canter, then by adding haunches into the very collected canter, and finally adding the turn. One of the biggest challenges during the turn for the pirouette, was that my horse really wanted to swing her haunches out on the turn to avoid the engagement. One way that we worked to combat this was by going haunches in on the rail to haunches in on a circle.



As a side note, Lendon also suggested using the wall/rail as a physical barrier to help with straightening the horse. During my lessons we used it whenever my horse wanted to throw her haunches to the outside, but Lendon explained that it could be used to help with any crookedness issue.

Additionally we discussed the role that canter quality plays in tempi changes. While tempi-changes were not a major focus of my lessons, we tried a line or two. Lendon emphasized the importance of maintaining a good canter quality in between each change to improve the quality of each individual change.

While Lendon expressed that mistakes were okay to make, she also explained the necessity for changing exercises when it became too challenging for the horse or if something simply wasn't working. She explained that there is no use in drilling exercises when they were not making an improvement to the horse that day. Finally, throughout the clinic Lendon stressed that the work we were doing was challenging and required a lot of strength. Therefore, practicing collection a little bit at a time was key to improving the overall strength of the horse.