

Jodie Kelly Clinic

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A couple weeks ago I had the opportunity to ride with Jodie Kelly at the April Dressage4kids clinic at Unlimited Dressage in Alpharetta, Georgia. I had one of the most educational experiences at this clinic. This was the first clinic for my 4 year old KWPN gelding, Ouzhou, and also his first trip off property to ride at another farm. When first applying for this clinic I was very excited to ride with Jodie as she is known for developing young horses from lower levels to FEI and Ozzy is my first young horse.

For my first ride on Saturday we started by working just on keeping Ozzy relaxed and forward to the contact. Ozzy is already very confirmed in the contact and steers well so the beginning of our ride was just allowing him to relax and settle into his work at a new farm. After he had warmed up we started playing with his adjustability in the trot. Since his only 4 we haven't tried to change his speed too much but after seeing him, Jodie decided he was ready to introduce the idea. When we started asking him to slow down and step under behind she reminded me that it is super important to keep everything he does fun. Working is supposed to be a game for him and if it is not fun he will not want to play. Another important thing she mentioned was that he does not need to stay in the smaller or larger trot for very long, just long enough that he settles and becomes comfortable going to that place, and once he is comfortable in that place, you can stay in it longer each time. On Sunday we played with the same idea of changing his tempo in the trot again but instead of going to a smaller trot we worked on pushing him forward into a bigger trot without him breaking to the canter or losing his balance. This was a little harder for him because he loves to canter but once he figured it out, he had so much fun with it. I think the most influential thing Jodie said to me was that you start developing your

passage, piaffe, extended canter, etc. when your horse is young even if though it does feel or look like any of those movements yet. Adding onto that she also talked about if you never introduce the ideas of collection and extension you may overwhelm the horse when they're older with FEI levels of collection and/or extension.

I also learned so much from the guest speakers we had throughout the weekend. On Saturday, we got meet with Agi Yother who is a biomechanical specialist and she helped all of us understand our strong and weak points as riders. She talked about how important it is that we stay aligned in our bodies while in the saddle and the affects that improper alignment can have on our riding. For myself, I tend to sit a little forward in the saddle which is partially because of my horse being young but no matter it is something I will need to work on. Agi also talked to us about different ways to calm our horses so they can be as relaxed as possible. One of the few ways she gave us is to run your fingers in the groove of your horse's shoulder and scratch them their as it can help them relax. Another couple of tips she gave us was both to scratch their lower butt to get them to stretch their back. You can also get the same stretch by stretching their stomach. On Sunday, we met with Cheryl Williams who specializes in sports psychcolgy and she gave us some tips on how to stay relaxed and prepared at horse shows. She talked to us about how important it is that we find the different ways that work for each of us as riders to calm our nerves. Some suggestions she gave us were to journal, to run our tests in our head, make check lists, or to even listen to our favorite song before getting onto ride.

Overall, I had an absolutely wonderful weekend at the Jodie Kelly clinic. Not only was the clinic educational but it was also so fun! It is always a great group of riders at every Dressage4Kids clinic and they are always excellently run. I am extremely thankful

Dressage4kids, Lendon Gray, Jodie Kelly, Unlimited Dressage, and Liz Molloy for all they do to give back to young dressage riders like myself.