

I used my scholarship money to attend boot camp in preparation for LYDF. I learned so much while attending boot camp and it prepared me to compete as well.

The first day:

We started out each day with Balimo. Balimo is a bit like yoga, but it is developed especially for dressage riders. Our riding instructor Hollie spent several years training to be an instructor and dressage competitor with Mr. Eckhart, the man who created it. She teaches it to us during every boot camp. This year she brought along DVDs of her doing the exercises with Eckhart and we all laughed a lot.

After we had all done several exercises to loosen our shoulders and neck we moved onto the horrible skipping exercise. We all have trouble with it because you have to skip, bringing your knee up across your body, swinging your arms the other way, and pointing your head in the direction of your knee. It helps with cross-coordination, but every single one of us laugh like lunatics when we attempt to do this. It is easier said than done. As weird as I feel doing it, it really helps to loosen up my back and improves my coordination.

After completing Balimo we split up. With nineteen of us we couldn't all ride or groom at once, so eight of us went to groom with Denise Film, a local pony club/ natural horsemanship/ turn-out expert. Throughout the day others worked with Hollie in equitation or with Gail Kapiloff, a local judge, trainer, and competitor. In between it all we studied with a friend's mom who is a teacher at the high school I attend.

I started out with Denise which was good because Lear, Hollie's school horse whom I ride, hadn't been clipped or pulled for a very long time. Denise taught us all the key points of clipping, (go with the fur, don't press down, never leave your horse on cross-ties) which I had never learned (the reason Lear hadn't been clipped in so long), and offered advice on how short we should pull our horse's manes (I have no excuse for not pulling Lear's mane.) Pretty soon, Lear looked like a gorgeous dressage appaloosa, or dressagealoosa as we say.

Next, after a hurried lunch, I warmed up for my forty-five minute session with Gail. I rode test c for her first because that was what we were competing. Gail then had us doing spiral in spiral out circles, with transitions between gaits halfway through the spiral out segment. This really helped us because while our working trot is very good, our working canter and medium walk could stand improvement. Doing these gait transitions and continuing to leg-yield out really helped us keep the energy and bend, the things we were lacking previously.

After riding and grooming, I studied. And studied. And then studied some more. I'm not complaining because it was interesting, and I did do very well on my written test at LYDF.

The second day:

Yet again we started with Balimo. We worked on opening our hip flexors, which was painful, but in the end was worth it. Then we did the eagle, where we had to lift our bent arms towards the sky while lying on our stomachs. This also stretched our shoulders.

The majority of the day I spent studying. Our teacher had made us a practice quiz for the websites which we took and corrected. Around noon, I went to ride again.

This ride was for equitation with our instructor Hollie. Two of my camp-mates and I went out to the outdoor and warmed up in the heat. Pretty soon Hollie started to correct us on our positions. I was given tips on how to work on my toes that point out when I ride, and told to remember to relax every stride in posting trot so that Lear could relax as well. I was also tasked with sitting back, no easy task on a horse as downhill as Lear.

Last but definitely not least we worked on goal setting. We discussed what good goals are, and then wrote down some goals of our own for the show. Performance based goals are always better than result based goals, because you never know what will happen. My goal was to keep Lear on contact for my entire test c.

The third day:

This day we worked on our core muscles and stretching our jaws to relax through the neck. We also spent some time with an exercise ball getting to know our weaknesses with balance and strength.

Studying on this day consisted of taking our practice quiz on the book. This quiz is what we used to study with before the written test, and it helped immensely.

Our last ride was preparation for the chaos in the warmup ring at LYDF. Eight horses ended up in the indoor arena, which is a tight fit in the 20m by 60m arena. After almost running into my friends, accidentally cutting a few of them off, and making some weirdly shaped "circles," I got into the swing of things and started to remember how warm up arenas work.

The last thing we did was a personality test. This helped us figure out not only ourselves but our horses too and suggested how we would probably act during the show. I turned out to be mostly a lion, a leadership type with a lot of self-confidence, though my learning style was that of a book intensive beaver. Lear was also mainly a lion, which was a good reminder for me as I had to tell him who was boss when he decided he didn't want to spend time doing a dressage test at LYDF.

Boot camp always helps prepare me for LYDF. I learned how to clip, what personality mix I am, and that I have really tight hip flexors. I practiced the best ways to keep Lear's medium walk energetic, and I also remembered how important it is to be prepared. It also reminded me why I love dressage so much. My book worm point of view (a beaver learning style!) loves to study all the details, and I love just riding, grooming, and showing.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Hadley Perkins