

Bella Perkins – D4K Scholarship 2022

I received this scholarship for lessons with Hollie McNeil to prepare me and my horse, Rhapsody, for the US Dressage Finals this year. This was the first year I've competed at Regional Championships, let alone Nationals, so I needed a lot of help before I felt ready! Thank you for helping me be able to prepare for this amazing opportunity!!

The biggest part of our lessons was working on Rhapsody's relaxation. In the short time I've had him, he's been pretty nervous at every show we've gone to and we hadn't figured out a way to help him relax. We did long and low type warmups with the idea of a "falling down neck" and lots of bending for each ride. The plan was to have these kind of warmups at the show and it worked very well for our practice test! Unfortunately we didn't work enough on myself being relaxed so that affected both of us for our championship ride. We also worked on keeping him straight, especially tracking right when he wants to throw his shoulder out and haunches in. When he does this, he gets stuck and can't move forward. This makes everything more difficult, but especially shoulder-in. We figured out that I needed to stay more connected with my outside rein to keep his shoulder from falling out and use more right leg to keep his haunches in. When I had him straight, his whole body relaxed and he was able to move forward in a swinging trot. Our shoulder-in and haunches-in were the best they've ever been and it was an amazing feeling. In walk, he tends to get quick and either prances or break into trot. This seemed to improve as well when I had him straight.



We had lessons the two days before leaving for Kentucky and we worked on the smaller details. We did a lot of different things to keep him supple and not trying to guess what we were doing. Walk to canter transitions were great, canter work was great. We had a very good canter to walk transition when I did a quick release with my arms as he walked. For our free walk, I've tried to hold him back because I know he will get quick. We did a lot of free walk where I acted like we were done with a long rein to the buckle and feet out of my stirrups. Hollie said that for the judging program, they learned that a free walk that's on the buckle, with the horse's head lowered and on a somewhat straight line should always be a 8 or 9. I'm usually more afraid that he's going to get too quick or start trotting so I don't give him enough rein.

Turn on the haunches have been a long journey for us! Main points to remember were to ride like half pass, sit to inside, look to inside hind leg. Make bigger rather than getting stuck or stepping under. Wait until the last moment for each turn to have the most time to prepare. Don't prepare too early and make it obvious. Start with shoulders then a little haunches in. Don't slow down, think forward.



Simple changes only need 2-3 walk steps. If they're good, don't wait. If he's ready, let him go. Don't try to make more walk steps. To the left, feel him more with the right rein and less with left. When he gets stuck in canter, give with arms and let him go.

Thank you again for granting me this scholarship. I've learned a lot not only from these lessons, but also from going to Nationals and competing in that kind of atmosphere. I now know that I have to work a lot on my own nerves. I'm so happy with how Rhapsody did and can't wait for what we'll do next!

