

Scholarship Report by Jocelyn Wiese

I was lucky enough to ride with Morten Thomsen October 12 and 13, 2009 at Hilltop Farm in Colora, MD. I rode my 13-year-old Danish gelding, Lamborghini, fondly known as “Zoomie”. Zoomie and I have competed at the Brentina Cup (I-II) level and will be moving on to Grand Prix in 2010. The clinic featured riders such as Chris Hickey, Courtney King-Dye, Sharon McCusker, J.J. Tate, and Lauren Sprieser. The following is a report of my lessons with Morten:

MONDAY

On my first day riding with Morten he watched my warm up, without comment. After I finished, the first thing he focused on was that it looked like I was always holding Zoomie back and that I needed to let him go more. He noticed the same thing in the canter and this is what we began to focus on. He had me do medium canter on the circle and bring him back with only my seat and not my hands. This allowed me to bring the medium canter back to a collected canter without hindering the power with my hands. When it finally clicked, the transitions between medium canter and collected canter became much smoother and the overall quality of the canter was bigger and more uphill.

We then went on to work the tempi changes. Morten had me ride off the track and he immediately noticed that Zoomie was jumping side to side in the changes rather than underneath his body. To counteract this, Morten had me ride leg yield into the changes. For example, before a change from left to right I would leg yield off my right leg. This would help to bring Zoomie’s right hind leg underneath him and then he was able to jump under in the change, not out. It got to the point when the leg yield was so subtle that it was barely noticeable from the ground. However, the improvement in the quality of the changes was very noticeable! Morten then had me show him the one tempis, which can be a little difficult especially when Zoomie is tight. Morten saw that the changes get very quick and ground bearing, not big and uphill like the

changes we had been doing. Morten had me ride four one-tempis and then get the quality of the canter back, and then return to four more one-tempis. He stressed the importance of quality, not quantity.

Morten then had me show him the trot, piaffe, and passage. We did a beautiful trot half pass each way and then went on to the passage and then piaffe. Morten immediately picked up the fact that the rhythm of the piaffe is completely different than the rhythm of the passage. He said the passage was quite nice and that the piaffe was not so nice. He then asked me if I ever rode with a whip (which I don't) and went and picked up a whip and a bamboo stick. Zoomie immediately started to get nervous and grind his teeth but Morten had me stand on the wall while he got Zoomie comfortable with the whip and also just with having a person on the ground. He then had me just sort of sit there and keep him on the bit while he used the bamboo stick to get the correct rhythm of the piaffe behind. After a few minutes we began with passage with Morten next to me helping to get more activity behind. We did this both ways and then went on to bringing the passage back into

almost on the spot passage, but going forward before Zoomie got nervous and started with his sewing machine piaffe. We did this both ways and there were a couple times where I could really feel him come back to almost on the spot passage. When Zoomie would get really nervous, Morten would have me trot forward on a circle and then come back to the passage. At one point Zoomie's tail got tangled with the whip, which scared him, but he got over it quickly.

Once we were both pleased, and Morten felt that I had gotten the right idea, we let Zoomie stretch in the trot and canter to help get him to finish on a relaxed note. Zoomie finished the session by nodding and shaking his head to the people watching, obviously very proud of himself.

Overall I was very pleased with my first session with Morten. He quickly picked up on our weaknesses and gave me some very good exercises to use, especially the one with the tempi changes. I was also

very proud with how well Zoomie handled the work with Morten on the ground. Although he got very nervous, it was still extremely constructive.

TUESDAY

On the second day of the clinic, Zoomie warmed up beautifully. He had gotten very tight and nervous the day before, so I was pleasantly surprised when he came out like a champion, as ready as ever. Today Morten did not watch my initial walk/trot/canter but I used what we had worked on from the day before to warm up more effectively in a bigger, more engaged trot and a jumpier, more forward canter.

When Morten came in I picked up the sitting trot, ready to go to work. However, he asked me why I had done such gorgeous trot half-passes the day before and how come I was not doing them then. He stressed that I should not ask for any lateral work until my horse was forward and uphill and that I should not do any “mediocre” half-passes or shoulder ins, only brilliant ones. We then went back into rising trot and got Zoomie really cruising. We then went into the canter and did the same thing; riding very forward canter on the long sides and diagonals with me bringing him back with only my seat, not my hands.

After getting Zoomie really going we went back to the exercise in the tempi changes we had done the previous day. After ensuring that Zoomie was jumping under and not out in the changes, we went on to the canter zigzag. We did not do it “to count”, only as an exercise. Morten had me do four strides of half-pass to two strides of leg yield and then to the flying change. I was making the mistake of changing direction before the flying change had even come through which is why we did the two strides of leg yield. After doing this exercise a couple of times I could really feel Zoomie jumping under in the changes, making it much easier to start the next half pass.

We then went on to the pirouettes. Morten had me do a big schooling pirouette on a circle really thinking haunches in. I would then walk and think leg

yield out on the circle, and then I would continue on into canter and the pirouette. The leg yield out really helped me to keep my inside leg on and keep the bend and also the activity. Morten was very happy with the pirouettes so we did not spend much time on them.

Next Zoomie and I did our “brilliant” trot half-passes. Before the half-passes Morten reminded me to let go and let Zoomie trot. I did half-passes like in the Grand Prix and they were so easy, forward, and uphill. Morten was very pleased and did not have much to say, so we then moved on to the piaffe and passage. Today Morten did not help me from the ground but we continued with working to keep the same rhythm in the piaffe and passage. We did passage on a 10-meter volte to the right and Morten had me think like I was doing a turn on the forehand in passage. This brought Zoomie back to almost on the spot without him getting nervous. We then went to the left and did the same thing. However it wasn't working quite as well. Zoomie got nervous and started cantering, so instead Morten had me try thinking turn on the haunches in the passage and it worked! I wasn't able to bring him back to “on the spot” but Morten felt that in only a couple sessions of this exercise I would find a lot of improvement.

Zoomie was a lot less nervous today, which made me very pleased, and we ended the session with long, deep, trot letting him get his nervous energy out. Overall Morten was very pleased with our session. He said that I was, “not bad” for a 21 year old riding Grand Prix and told me to take very good care of my special horse!

I am very thankful to have gotten the opportunity to ride with Morten. It was an extremely beneficial clinic and I learned a lot in a very short amount of time. I'm excited to take what I have learned and apply it to my everyday routine with Zoomie as well as all the other horses that I

ride. Although Zoomie is a Grand Prix horse and we worked on Grand Prix movements, his fundamental principles can be applied to all horses at all levels. It is key to always ride forward and not restrict the horse's movement in any way as well as never to sacrifice the quality of the gaits for a movement.