

Taylor Karriker

Bill McMullin Clinic, May 18th & 20th

This past month, I was given another opportunity to ride with Bill McMullin. The plan was to take my horse “Z”, but sadly, he turned up lame before we were supposed to leave. Fortunately, one of my close friends offered her horse Eddie, a 16-year-old Hanoverian, that I know well and have ridden before. Z and Eddie are both working around the Prix St. Georges and Intermediaire I levels and share some similar struggles. It was extremely helpful to be able to address some of these same struggles that I have with my own horse but with a slightly different feel. I feel that it has taught me how to adapt a familiar exercise to another horse's aids and needs.

One general problem area that I've been trying to work on with Eddie is his tendency to carry his head and neck quite high, brace his underneck and hollow his back. When he uses his body in this way, he becomes quite tense and tends to stick his tongue out. My warmup with him usually consists of long and low stretchy trot with plenty of bending lines, as well as going up to canter quite early in the ride as I find this is the easiest gait for him to come over his back early on. Bill agreed with this approach but suggested that I add extra bend through the body going into corners and outside half halts coming out of them for more thoroughness to help Eddie drape his neck more. This was very effective, as Eddie began to lower his neck, lift his back and engage his hind end more effectively.

The next thing we touched on was improving Eddie's trot quality and lateral movements. We started shoulder-in down the longside, and half way through, I asked Eddie to walk while maintaining the shoulder-in and increasing the angle slightly. After a few steps in the walk, I asked him to trot off again while keeping the shoulder in. This exercise helped Eddie balance himself better on his hind end and when Bill asked me to push him more forward in the shoulder-in, he had a better quality trot with more cadence. Bill also reminded me to make sure Eddie kept his neck draped during the transitions, which also helped with his tendency to brace. Continuing in the trot, we worked on the steepness and angle of

our half passes. We did this by starting a half-pass and bringing him to the walk while keeping the half-pass positioning and half halting to make it steeper, then going back to trot with this increased collection.

The next issue I wanted to address was the canter pirouettes. Eddie is very good at sitting and has a strong left pirouette; however, the right is not as simple. He has a tendency to take over in the right pirouette by straightening out his body and spinning very quickly. There were a couple exercises that Bill showed us that helped.

The first exercise was to address Eddie wanting to stiffen and straighten out his body in the pirouette. Starting in canter, we did a few steps of half pass off the track and then, like a leg yield, pushed him back to the track while maintaining the bend and shape from the half pass. This helped me keep the bend in his body, gain better control of his shoulders and improve his balance.

The next exercise involved the pirouette itself. We started on a circle and made it smaller by pushing him into haunches-in with the idea of doing a pirouette. After about three to four strides, or for Eddie, when I start to feel him fall onto his inside shoulder, brace his neck or become too slow and labored, I pushed him over with my inside leg at the girth to a leg yield on a circle. Once he felt balanced again, We repeated the exercise until we were able to achieve a full pirouette without them falling in or bracing. This helps bring the horse back upright, balance them and allows you to gain back access to their shoulders.

Despite not being able to bring my partner Z, I learned many valuable tools that I can continue to use with Eddie and to apply to Z in the future. Thank you to Dressage4Kids for allowing me to attend this clinic and continue to progress in my dressage education.