

On January 10th and 11th, I had the opportunity to ride in a clinic with Michael Bragdell at Cara Klothe Dressage. I rode Ruben D4K, a 2010 Hanoverian gelding who I received through D4K in 2022. The clinic focused heavily on quality, preparation, and rideability, with exercises designed to improve collection, straightness, and clarity of the aids in the upper-level work.

We started with tempi changes on the quarterline, an area where Ruben can tend to get quick. The focus was on sharpening his response to the aids while keeping the shoulders lifted and the canter truly collected. We started by riding 2 two tempi's, followed by a few straight strides, then two more further down the quarterline. This was gradually built up to four two-tempis, straightening for a few strides, and then four more. An 8-meter volte can be added when needed to help regather the canter. A key point of the exercise was starting the changes after riding two straight strides on the quarterline, rather than traveling too far down the line and feeling rushed to fit the changes in. We used a similar concept when introducing the one tempi's, where we did two one tempi's, then straight a few strides, and then a 2 more, and trying to do 4 sets of ones down the quarterline.

The trot work focused on developing adjustability and expression while maintaining balance. We worked on pushing the trot toward a medium, then bringing it back into a more forward, expressive passage feel, followed by transitions into half steps before trotting forward again. In the canter work, we rode shallow half-pass zigzags with simple changes through the walk to help break down the different parts of the movement, while maintaining thoroughness.

Overall, the clinic focused on the importance of correct preparation and maintaining quality within each movement. Michael's emphasis on straightness, collection, and thoughtful organization helped improve Ruben's balance and responsiveness through the weekend. The exercises provided clear, practical tools that will be valuable moving forward as we continue to develop his adjustability, confidence, and strength in the work.

The focus through the whole weekend was getting horses more responsive to the aids. One of the exercises that helped with this was riding a diagonal from K to X with a change of lead over the quarterline, followed by a volte at X, and then another diagonal from X to H with a second change of lead. The changes of lead could be flying changes, or simple changes through the walk or trot. This helped improve the setup, balance, and organization before the changes.

Thank you to everyone who made this clinic possible!