

Finding Balance

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The weekend of September 6th- 8th I had the opportunity of attending the Dressage4kids Clinic and Atlanta Youth Festival with Lendon Gray and Rachael Chowanec Kaney at the Georgia International Horse Park in Conyers, GA. This is my 4th time partaking in this particular D4K clinic and it never fails to disappoint. This year I brought my newest partner, Next In Line EDI who is more affectionately known as Venti. He is a 6 year old KWPN Gelding by Vivialdi who I received from the D4K horse donation program in July of this year. This is my second horse that I have received from Lendon and Dressage4kids and I could not be more grateful for the endless opportunities D4K continues to offer me.

This was my first Clinic with Venti and the first time I have taken him anywhere overnight and I truly could not be more proud of the young gentlemen he is proving to be. On the first day of the clinic we had the opportunity to ride with Rachael Chowanec Kaney who is not only an extremely successful rider and Trainer but also another rider who grew up in the dressage4kids program. Rachael spent a lot of time working with and developing young horses and had so much insight into new ideas to continue Venti's education. Venti is extremely smart and loves to work so it is important to keep everything playful and short so that we do not cause any burnout mentally or physically. One of my favorite exercises she had us do was leg yield to half pass back to leg yield in both the trot and canter. This allowed him to keep thinking and not get too stuck in the idea of the leg yield or half pass while also developing a stronger lateral suppleness. Another one of my favorite suppling exercises she had us play with is the ability to move both the haunches and shoulder on a 20 meter circle in the canter while also collecting and extending the gait. Venti is at the stage in his development where you start playing with the idea

of pirouette canter and the ability to collect within the gait not just between the gaits. I felt that being able to have control of both his shoulder and haunch allowed me to have way more control of the size of the canter.

The following day I had the opportunity to ride him Lendon and I was particularly excited as she had not seen him go in person yet. Venti's biggest struggle is definitely his confidence in the connection and he has a tendency to get a bit short in the frame when learning something new. We spent the most of our lesson working on building his confidence to continue taking the bit out into the connection. He is extremely rideable and connected to the seat so it is easy as the rider gets too light in the connection. To help combat his tendencies and my own tendency of getting too light we played with a lot of forward and back transitions to allow him the opportunity to even in the back transition keep pushing forward over the back and into the contact. We also talked about how important the accuracy of our transitions are with young horses. They are incapable of being accurate when learning new movements and we can never punish a try even when there is a mistake so it is important as the rider to minimize the opportunity for mistakes in things such as circles, short sides, and centerlines. By the end of our lesson he felt the most confident and open in the connection I have ever felt him!

As always I walked away with so many new tools and lessons that I am able to apply to not only Venti but all of the horses I have the opportunity to ride. Clinics are such an invaluable experience and I am endlessly grateful for the team of devoted people who makes the opportunities possible. Especially Liz Molloy who has devoted her life to the development of Georgia's youth and continues to bring exceptional clinicians to Georgia every year. Of course none of this would be possible with Lendon Gray and Dressage4kids endless generosity to

dressage's up and coming riders. The Impact D4k has on the sport is deep and is only continuing to grow.