Taylor Karriker

Region 5 FEI Youth Clinic with George Williams, October 17th & 18th

Last month, I had the opportunity to ride with George Williams in the Region 5 FEI Youth Clinic. It was a very engaging and informative clinic that gave me many insights and goals to work towards as Z and I progress towards the U25. A fundamental and very important concept George reminded me to pay attention to is the suppleness on both sides of the horse especially in lateral movements such as leg yields and halfpasses where Z tends to stiffen to one side or the other. George also emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent and forward tempo throughout the work.

Next, I explained that while Z's canter work is quite solid, there is an imbalance when we are tracking right. After watching Z warmup in the left canter and switching to the right lead, George noticed that Z's canter was flatter and less up hill to the right because he wasn't carrying as much weight on his hind legs. To remedy this, he told me to use half halts in the rhythm of the canter when each of the hindlegs land to ask Z to sit up and load more weight on his hind end. After giving a couple half halts on the circle and really using my seat to complete the aid, Z's canter was much more uphill and his hind legs were much quicker. George also had us practice this a few times tracking left in counter canter (on the right lead). This also requires a lot of balance and engagement from the horse and builds strength to fix the imbalance.

The next exercises we did in the canter were to prepare and perform pirouettes. George had me begin by doing haunches in down the long side to get the inside leg to reach more. This was especially important for our pirouettes to the right, as Z tends to fall on his inside shoulder and spin on his hind end rather than stepping around with the inside hind leg. Next we did a pattern for the pirouettes: A turn down centerline in collected canter, paying attention that the horse is straight (slight shoulder fore), before C ride a half pirouette and head back towards A, maintain shoulder fore and as you reach A, do another half pirouette to head back towards C, finally at X, complete a full pirouette. As I was doing this exercise, it

really brought to my attention what I needed to watch for in the pirouettes going each direction. Going to the left, I need to make sure Z stays supple to the inside and maintains flexion and to the right I need to make sure to keep his shoulders upright, not allow them to fall in and think about making the pirouette bigger.

Next, we worked on developing half steps. Z's tend to get very hot and can sometimes become a little arrhythmic in the half steps/piaffe. So, George had Z and I start in a forward trot going large and asked me to think "how short can I make the step while maintaining an even rhythm and quality?" This took some of the pressure off of thinking about going directly to the piaffe which allowed Z to feel a lot more relaxed and therefore maintain a clearer rhythm as we collected. We repeated the transitions going from a larger trot to a smaller trot in both directions until Z was comfortable with keeping the rhythm. We then brought him back towards half steps/piaffe and it was a lot clearer and relaxed.

Lastly, I brought up something that can often be overlooked and is something Z and I definitely struggle with: the collected walk. Z naturally has a very big walk with a lot of overtrack in the extended walk making it quite difficult to collect. When collecting the walk, he tends to get lateral and take shorter steps with his right hind making the walk irregular. George noticed that in our walk breaks and lateral, Z's walk looked completely regular. It only became irregular when we began to collect and he was anticipating the next movement. To fix this tracking left, he had me collect the walk and ask Z for renvers whenever he began to shorten the stride on the right hind to encourage him to lengthen the stride again. When tracking left, I would ask for travers to get the same effect. While the walk could be thought of as easy, it can actually be quite difficult and often doesn't get as much attention as it should. This exercise was extremely helpful for clearing up Z's walk.

I learned so many important tools and was reminded of many fundamentals that can be overlooked over time. I really enjoyed learning alongside my peers from Region 5. Thank you to Dressage4Kids for allowing me to attend this clinic and continue to progress in my dressage education.