Clinic with Sabine Schut-Kery

August 8-9, 2026

Because of the generosity of Dressage4Kids, I was recently able to attend a two-day clinic with Sabine Schut-Kery at Faxon Ranch in Ribera, NM. This was one of the first major clinic outings for my six-year-old Connemara x Westphalian gelding, LG, who I backed and started under saddle myself after acquiring him at the end of his two-year-old year. He is the first young horse I have trained and ridden, and, like I explained to Sabine at the start of our first session, some of the issues that appeared on the very first day of backing and the very conception of work under saddle, have, because of my own ignorance, festered into more extensive challenges. Outstanding of those is his disrespect of the leg aids, particularly the forward driving aids, but also, as Sabine led me to understand, the lateral positioning and bending leg aids. Because I failed to nip his slight obstinate tendencies in the bud during his initial exposure to the aids, ignoring or protesting against the leg aids is now ingrained in his mind and his evasion of choice.

On the first day, Sabine took care to explore the evasion comprehensively, addressing each unsatisfactory component of his training and my manner of riding him as they became manifest throughout our warm up and the course of the ride. Through this, I gained a more complete picture of both everything that may have contributed to LG's reluctance to accept the leg aids and of how far-reaching and integrated the evasion is in almost the entirety of his work under saddle. One of the very first things she noticed and brought to my attention was the extent of how much this evasion has influenced and has been influenced, and can in the future be corrected and exhumed, by my own posture and a tactful manner of riding, guiding him through the arena and through figures in a manner that accommodates his unique difficulties. When he would protest against the leg or forward driving aids, Sabine quickly noted my tendency to collapse my upper body and lean forward, abandoning my seat. She advised me to bring my shoulders back, “sit straight” longitudinally, and even lean slightly

back with my upper body so that my core is engaged and my seat is in a position where it can be effective as an aid and influence the hind legs. Sabine made it very clear that I must start to ride LG much more from my seat (“90% from the seat and legs, and 10% from the ring fingers and wrists”) and that I must avoid underestimating the influence of the seat. Because of his frequent objection to my leg aids, I developed the habit of limiting their use so as not to enter into an argument, but this only exacerbates the problem. This became clear when I began to sit straight and open my upper body and he took the change in my body as an excuse to limit the activity of his hind legs even more. Sabine advised me to help him now re-learn that “when you sit straight, it means go forward.” She also quickly recognized my tendency to bring my left hand across his neck in an indirect rein aid, which she termed a “911 aid” to beg him to move left when he ignores the lateral aid from my left leg.

Sabine encouraged me to utilize three- and four-loop serpentines to help establish a more supple and satisfactory reaction to my lateral leg aids. She advised me to tailor the exercise to LG's specific needs and difficulties: instead of riding a three-loop serpentine as three 20 m half circles, she recommended riding each change of rein from a straighter line, which allowed time and space to truly establish and achieve clear bend and suppleness from one direction to the other. Sabine also made it very clear that, in training, it is perfectly acceptable and even crucial to adapt one's use of the arena and the lines and figures in it to each particular horse's idiosyncrasies and the stage and purpose of their current education. She advised me to avoid riding a deep corner or even riding each diagonal line too far into the following corner, as this only made it easier for LG to lose activity and the willingness to remain in front of the leg.

Our second and final session with Sabine was an even more lucrative experience for our partnership and methodology for future training progression. Now with a much clearer understanding of the nuances of LG's evasion and resistance, we worked less on overcoming resistance in his body than in his mind. Sabine realized that he is so focused on not going, that the trick is not to just make him go but to almost “outsmart” him and thereby recapture his attention, focus, and willingness.

Keeping his mind occupied constantly with trot-walk-trot transitions, trot-halt-trot transitions, and little tests of asking for brief intervals of more active walk, trot, and canter, followed by “neutralizing” the forward driving aids (applying only enough to maintain the gait) were very successful approaches. “He is a little bit like the class clown at school, who is bored and is thinking of nothing but being naughty. So you have to keep him constantly occupied: asking what is 3 x 6, what is 4 x 8, etc.”