

## NCDCTA SYMPOSIUM WITH HENK VAN BERGEN



I have eagerly anticipated attending the NCDCTA Symposium with Henk Van Bergen since it was announced late last year. Mr. Van Bergen is the only clinician who has been invited to give the USDF Symposium twice. You can imagine how excited I was to attend his Symposium just a few hours from home at North Star Training Center in Chapel Hill, NC.

Henk has a long and impressive resume of riding, teaching and training internationally including coaching both the Dutch and Japanese Teams at 3 different Olympics, with the Dutch team winning a Silver medal at Barcelona. He is an extremely articulate and humorous clinician, not just teaching dressage lessons but also sharing important life lessons.

It was nice to hear that Henk was very complementary of the seat and riding position he sees in U.S. riders. He pointed out that even the juniors and amateurs that rode in his NCDCTA clinic had very supple and balanced seats. But he still feels that the high quality and good temperaments of the dressage horses today frequently compensate for the weakness of the riders.

Henk was inspiring in his discussion about goals. We should go for the moon and if we don't make it at least we will end up among the stars. Most of the best international riders he has known have struggled with finances, difficult horses and other circumstances. In spite of that, they were all so motivated & dedicated that they found ways to work it out. His advice to riders is that many people who do dressage also want a big house, a vacation in the Bahamas and a fancy car. Most of the time, it is not possible to have it all. Dressage is a not just a sport, but it is a lifestyle for those who are truly dedicated. There are only a few people who really want to learn good riding. Most people want to go to competitions and win classes, which is not really the point of it all.

The warm-up that Henk requested was similar for all levels, using simple circles, straight and bending lines. The warm-up is the rider's diagnostic for the day and should be as short as possible or as long as necessary. There should always be a logical following of importance each day and all the way to the highest levels. He insisted that the riders ask questions of their horses even in the warm-up.

He asked riders to challenge their horses in order to excel. If you don't ask more of the horse, then they will never progress. You'll be in the same place next year as you are right now. But taking risks is a little like stepping on ice. You make one step at a time, carefully, feeling it out and being willing to go forward or take a step back as necessary.

If you want to train you horse then you must put them to work. The work frequently takes the horse to the edge of what he is physically and mentally capable of doing.

I loved his description of Transitions! “Transitions are like the cement that binds the bricks of a wall together”. The wall will fall down without the cement to hold it together. He first asked riders to do many transitions within the gaits even during the warm-up. These need to be obedient, balanced and through the neck before you progress to transitions from one gait to another.

One of the lasting impressions I got from Henk is that “not bad” is simply not good enough. “Almost Good” is really just a nice word for “Still Wrong”. Henk inspired the rider and auditors to always be VERY GOOD!

Thank you to NCDCTA and to Lynn Leath for sponsoring the symposium with this inspiring Master of Dressage.

Kathy Rowse

*Above Photo: Henk is standing. Bernadine Dembosky is riding Without a Doubt  
Above Photo credit: Margaret Rogers*