

NCDCTA AA Dressage Clinic Series with JJ Tate



The Western division of the NCDCTA AA Clinic Series with JJ Tate was hosted by Jackie Harris at her Serendipity Farm in Columbus, June 18-19. According to Harris, JJ tailored her lessons to address the specific needs of each horse and rider combination; and everyone “took home valuable information to put into their training toolbox.” Kristen Downs agreed that the “clinic was a great experience,” and added that Harris was “a great host on her beautiful farm.”

Some of the clinic participants shared their experiences:

- Several horses were a little spooky on the first day of the clinic. Among those was Downs’ 11-year old Swedish gelding, Junior, who “doesn’t have a lot of experience away from home.” In order to make these horses more attentive to their riders, JJ had the riders ask their horses to move actively forward into the contact and stretch over the topline. As a result, said Harris, “in a very short time they were able to proceed onto more advanced work without any tension.”
- On the other hand, some horses weren’t spooky at all! Kemper Penney’s 15-year old Hanoverian schoolmaster, Donizetti, can be “rather lazy,” and is “often behind the leg,” she explained. To address this issue, JJ helped Penney to develop a more effective leg with a real hands-on approach: “She came over and took my leg and showed me how a proper strong leg aid should feel (against the horse’s side), which helped a lot.” Then JJ gave Penney a series of exercises in which she could not only test the effectiveness of her leg aids, but also increase her horse’s suppleness in the process. Specifically, they pair practiced doing haunches-in on the circle and leg yields in the canter. Penney has incorporated this work into her daily routine, and is already seeing results in terms of her increased effectiveness and her horse’s increased responsiveness!
- Joy Vassallo and her 10-year old Dutch gelding, Taxi, both started out a bit tense the first day. JJ helped both of them to relax by having Vassallo allow Taxi to “stretch down and do frequent changes of flexion in walk, trot and canter” to get his attention. The second day, the lesson focused more on the rider: keeping her seat squarely in the saddle, and understanding how to influence the horse with different parts of her body independently of one another (i.e., seat, calf and knee). To practice and test the effectiveness of her aids, JJ asked Vassallo to do the following exercise: trot down center line; leg yield to the quarter line; 10-meter circle (to establish the correct bend for half pass); half pass to center line. JJ also provided step-by-step instruction for riding the half pass: “bend the horse around the inside leg and put your weight into that stirrup to lead the horse in that direction, while using your outside knee to keep the horse’s shoulder up.” Vassallo, who is currently competing at Second level and schooling Third level with Taxi, said that “since this clinic, I’ve played with ‘adding my knees’ more into my riding and I’m finding it very helpful!”
- Vassallo’s other horse, Quintair, a 9-year old Dutch gelding who is currently showing Second level, “hangs on the right rein a lot.” JJ explained that “while we need to be there for him, we also need to teach him to carry himself.” To accomplish this goal, she had the rider change direction frequently, while giving with the rein – and therefore not allowing the horse to hang. The pair repeated this process in walk, trot and canter, and then layered on the leg yield-circle-half pass exercise (detailed above) to keep the horse supple without giving him the opportunity to hang. The horse improved each day, and the rider was thrilled!

Harris observed that “JJ’s training toolbox is amazing! It was clear to all that by incorporating her exercises into our everyday training programs we would soon reap the results. I already am benefitting from softer transitions and more carrying behind with both of my horses. Thank you NCDCTA!”

Photo Above: Jackie Harris riding Russian Standard aka Ruble. Photo credit to Marcy Wright