

### **NCDCTA AA Dressage Clinic Series with JJ Tate**



The NCDCTA's Adult Education Committee sponsored a series of three JJ Tate dressage clinics for adult amateurs across the state. Twelve riders and twenty auditors attended the eastern clinic, which was hosted by Catherine Marks at her Wind Drift Farm in Dover, July 9-10.

According to Lisa Graf, of New Bern, who organized the event, JJ was "gracious, humorous, articulate...and her energy was palpable!" She started off by encouraging horses (and their riders!) to relax. Then JJ "explained horse and rider biomechanics and riding theory in such a common sense manner that it was easily understandable for all levels of riders and auditors," from novice to FEI, said Graf.

Rider Tanya Horning, of Wilmington, particularly appreciated JJ's vivid and colorful use of imagery, noting that, "It's so hard to do away with old habits, but I will continue to work at it while using the fun (and funny!) visuals she provided." Robin Ainsworth, of Newport, concurred that JJ is "a wonderful communicator" whose creative use of visual imagery not only "made the whole experience fun," but effectively conveyed fresh "ideas for my toolbox!" Graf shared some of JJ's insights:

- The seat encompasses the area from the knee to the top of the head – it is not just the seat bones. It includes the knee, core, shoulders and head. One should let the leg hang long and close the inside of the calf, knee and hamstrings. The knee should not be pinched but it should close against the horse. The lower leg sends the horse's hind leg forward and "over his back" and finally the hand assists by receiving the energy. Contact should be light and forward thinking – not backward. The hand should not block the forward engagement.
- The bit should be a quiet, tranquil, happy place. The seat can be more "bossy."
- "As in all things, we gain more when we let go."
- Support the "outside system" with the outside knee. The horse should always feel support on the outside. We don't have the right to "take" on the outside until the horse is bending and stretching on the inside.
- Nothing randomly shows up at a horse show. The "issues" at home show up tenfold at a show.
- The calf creates the energy, but the seat directs the energy.
- If the horse becomes tense and tight in the back, think of a slight yield out on the circle.
- How the horse functions in the neck is directly related to how he functions in the back. If the rider maintains a bent elbow, it helps to create a round neck.
- Think of the arms as being pillars. The horse's hind legs get "kicked" through the goal posts (using soccer analogy).
- Horses evade in three ways: (1) speed; (2) inversion; and (3) crookedness.
- Power of the seat – think about a flashlight on each seat bone. Where the light shines is where the horse's hind legs will go. Engage the pelvis so that the seat bones rotate a bit forward. Seat should be "bossy". At the canter it should roll forward, softly scooping up.

Riders should remember to sit on their “anal ring” or AR (AKA “a\_\_ hole”). JJ related an anecdote about participating in a clinic with a well known European clinician and rider who told her to sit on her “A--H-le”. She said it left a vivid lasting impression. The AR should never come out of the saddle. The AR is the point of perfect balance. Always be present in the back of your seat.

- Always try to harmonize the horse with what you want to do – make it difficult for him to do what you don’t want.
- Horses are like people – being right handed or left handed. It is difficult for them on the side that is not natural for them. Horses are, in most cases, left sided - they prefer to go to left.
- With an anxious horse, let him finish the stride before giving another aid.
- Animal training is all about REPETITION.
- Half halts – Use the knee as part of the core in half halt. Use knee then relax knee. In rising trot, give the half halt aid at the rising stage – tighten core and knee. Do half halt/release – 3 times in a row. Think of it as a “hesitated post.”
- Flying Changes – Three ingredients are necessary to achieve effective flying changes: (1) quality of canter; (2) reaction to leg; (3) reaction to half halt.



This represents only a small fraction of the wisdom that JJ shared. So it’s no wonder that the eastern NC riders were thrilled with the experience, honored to work with JJ, and grateful to the NCDCTA for sponsoring the clinic. Sarah Langham, of Morehead City, enthusiastically concluded, “I hope I can find a way to ride with JJ again...the riders in eastern NC have never had such an expert in our area!! I can’t say enough!” Perhaps most important, Graf noted, was that

everyone, “went away with a better understanding of what they can do to improve their riding in their everyday work.”

***The central region clinic will be held October 8-9. For more information, go to [NCDCTA.org](http://NCDCTA.org).***

*Photos:*

1. AA rider Tanya Horning and Diantha worked with JJ Tate at the NCDCTA clinic held at Catherine Marks' Wind Drift Farm in Dover, NC. (Photo by Cathy Fletcher)
2. Auditors looked on as JJ Tate taught Robin Ainsworth and Sparkie at the NCDCTA AA dressage clinic. (Photo by Cathy Fletcher)