

USDF Instructor Certification Program

by Michele Ng

Foothills Chapter continued the USDF Instructors Certification Program that we began in 2012. This included a busy 2013 with three workshops and concluded with the Pre-Certification Testing the weekend of August 23-25 at Pacific Equestrian Center. Owner Mari Naten once again provided the group with a gorgeous working environment and well-maintained footing. Foothills Chapter's tireless group of volunteers staffed the event and managed to iron out the little wrinkles which unavoidably surfaced. The Participating Instructors, auditors, and demo riders represented several CDS Chapters including Foothills, Valley Oaks, Sacramento Valley, Delta Sierra, East Bay, Reno, and Los Angeles Chapters. We were pleased that the program was so well attended.

Each of the Participating Instructors had sessions in teaching, riding, lungeing the horse and lungeing the rider. Some PIs mock tested from Training Level to Second Level and a couple PIs tackled the Training Level to Fourth Level Pre-Cert. Regardless of the scores on the test sheets, the quality and knowledge of each PI shone through as Examiners Debbie Bowman and Bailey Cook felt that each of the participants had a shot at passing the testing if they applied themselves to improve their weak areas before the exam in June 2014. This is a tremendous success and we are so proud of those who participated in that grueling process: Jeanette Scanlon, Colleen Reid, Alejandro Salazar, Kalli Bowes, Marilyn Rickman, Wendy Rhea as well as all the demo riders who were so patient and understanding

our knowledge, experience and abilities strictly critiqued, we were going to do it in front of a large group of auditors.

I don't know about the other five, but there were definitely moments when I asked myself just why it was I had started this. Fortunately, I was able to come up with the answer. If you are not growing you are stagnating. All growing involves a struggle. And, I will state unequivocally, that I am a better teacher, trainer and rider for having taken on the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program.

At the start of the Training Manual, there are a few short paragraphs that describe, for the participants, the Objective of Dressage. In what follows I have tried to show how the USDF has put together the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program to promote these objectives in words, and to demonstrate them in deeds. The idea being to bring out in the participants, the real and certain knowledge, the understanding and desire to carry these Objectives into their own training and the training of their students, both human and equine.

I hope I am able to adequately describe the enjoyment that I drew from the entire program, its teachers and my fellow participants.

"The object of Dressage is the harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse. As a result it makes the horse calm, supple, loose and flexible but also confident, attentive and keen thus achieving perfect understanding with his rider." USEF Rule Book Dressage 101

When you apply an aid that doesn't work, release the opposing aid. Horses need freedom, ask them to accept one influence without cancelling it immediately with another influence.

To enable the horse to grow, the trainer must push him out to where his perfection begins to unravel, this is the stretch zone where you work to improve the little problems, then back off, to the comfort zone and let him relax again. This allows the horse to, not only expand his abilities but also to practice coping with a little stress and learning to trust that comfort will follow. (This also works with humans.)

Consider the seat not as a driving aid, but rather it is a support aid.

Bring the basics up the levels with you. Teach the horse to wait for the aid, in this way the horse learns good anticipation. The aids are not just there to tell the horse what to do, but also to LISTEN to the horse. The legs feel what is happening, the hands feel what is coming.

How does the Training Pyramid apply?.....What part of the Training Pyramid would you be thinking about now?..... If you are stuck, go back to the Training Pyramid, what is the first thing your horse needs?.....etc.

All of these concepts and more were spoken, demonstrated and impressed upon us the participants, NOT because it would enable us to pass a test but instead because it would allow us to work in harmony with our horses. We were asked to feel what we were doing and be able to explain it, (simply) and then to explain what it would lead to next. What could we do with what we had just demonstrated? How would what we were doing improve the horses understanding, or perhaps the students feel of the situation.

Questions, and then again, more questions. At first, it was incredibly frustrating, just as you thought you were getting into something, a voice would ring out. "Now, just why are you doing that?" (And just in case any of you decide to take this course, let me advise you that, "'Cause it feels right." Is NOT the answer they are looking for.)

As we got into the program, it became easier to respond accurately, (though in my case I still struggled with 'simply') because our thoughts and actions were more organized. I am not saying we didn't stutter a bit, look at the sky, push the sand around with our toe, but it wasn't because we didn't know the answer, it was because we were starting to learn to put the answer into the framework toward which we were being guided.

Instructor Trainer

by Colleen Reid

When beginning any major undertaking, one tries to go into it with as few preconceptions as possible, keeping an open mind and hoping for the best.

When I decided to undertake the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program, all of my friends and students said. "What a GREAT idea!"

And I said with some trepidation, "It is going to be a lot of work, but it does really sound like a GREAT idea."

As it happened I discovered, in the very first hour of the very first workshop, that this was going to be something really special. LOTS and LOTS of work, but a REALLY GREAT idea.

When I was asked to write down what made the Program such a GREAT idea, I looked at my reams of notes, and my piles of books, and my stacks of 5 X 7 note cards. I thought of the hours of conversation about the workshops, the sparking of ideas and the reawakening of old knowledge. I reflected on how every workshop, even or perhaps especially the ones that were a struggle motivated me to try harder.

And then I thought, "This could be a really long article."

Let me start by thanking Rachel Saavedra for her generosity of spirit and for her willingness to work with all of us to dig deep for the answers that she KNEW that we had at our disposal. As she pointed out, all six of us were proven trainers, teachers and competitors. We had all earned our USDF Bronze, Silver or Gold Medals. And in most cases, we had students who had also earned their USDF Bronze, Silver and Gold Medals. We had in fact proved ourselves in that most strenuous of schools, the open market. And now we were not only putting ourselves back into the schoolroom to have

Dressage is considered classical training because it uses gymnastic exercises-a series of movements and figures that have been studied and developed for centuries.

Instead of considering movements such as shoulder-in, travers, renvers, voltes, to name just a few, as movements that we need to accomplish in order to compete at certain levels, we must remember that these movements were intended to help the horse learn rhythm, relaxation, connection, impulsion, straightness and collection. Do these objectives ring a bell? Yes, here we are again at the Pyramid of Training.

Throughout the program, all things taught lead back to the Pyramid of Training. One of the ways used to portray the use of the Pyramid really struck me as summing up all the concepts into one concise phrase. "These (the pyramid) are as interconnected as struts on a bridge. All rely on each other to support and improve the whole." Rachel Saavedra

Rhythm needs to have energy and tempo.

In order for this to happen, then you need:
Relaxation that has elasticity and suppleness.

Having achieved this you will find:
Connection in the acceptance of the bit through the acceptance of the aids.

With the increase in connection that allows the horse to use his energetic rhythm and both a longitudinal and lateral elasticity he will take pleasure in the relaxed engagement that produces:
Impulsion as increased energy and thrust.

Using his impulsion in a relaxed and connected manner, enables his rhythm to develop cadence as he develops:
Straightness that improves alignment and balance.

With his increased acceptance of the aids, connection and engagement, the horse can clearly understand the riders suggestions as to the carrying of his weight both front to back and side to side and can carry out his tasks with the increased ease that will guide him to: Collection as he increases the engagement, lightness of the forehand, and self-carriage.

The qualities of the pyramid are the basis of and the reason for the gymnastic exercises. The important thing is not the movement but how the movement is done, not the figure, but how the figure is executed. But you must use the figures and movements in order to give yourself and your horse a pattern to guide the learning process.

Dressage should be therapeutic for the horse.

Remember that your horse is NOT the same on both sides. You must first recognize the difference in order to use the figures and movements that will strengthen and guide him to a straight and balanced performance. The stiffness or hollowness of the horse comes from the hind end, the symptoms show up in the front. The stiff side usually gives to the rein aid longitudinally, while the hollow side usually gives laterally first. Impulsion is not speed, but rather the release of energy stored by his engagement. Focusing on engagement, allows him to achieve balance in his forward activity. Before you can improve the horse's advanced work, you must first get him forward, engaged and attentive. Transitions, bending, canter are all tools that will help with this. This may well be your days work.

If from beginning to end the horse improves the qualities of the pyramid of training, then the work was successful even if you didn't get to the point that you originally planned on when you set out that day.

I do not remember a single example or phrase that was used during the program that did not emphasize that everything we do MUST lead to improvement in some manner of the horses or students work.

This is in no way implying there would not be struggle, for without struggle there can be no advancement. But keep it a struggle for advancement, not a struggle for dominance. Keep the exercises short and to the point, and then repeat them. Then move on to another exercise. Let the exercise lead the student, human or equine, to comfort with the figure or the movement. Let the exercise do the teaching.

The gradual logical progression of the gymnastic exercises not only leads to an obedient balanced mount but also improves the coordination of the rider.

The teacher can introduce lateral work to the horse or rider by exploring three variables; orientation, trajectory and shape. Lateral work, strengthens the weak link, be it leg or side or connection, and will be used differently on each side according to the need. Shoulder in and haunches-in and renvers were originally designed to be used on a large circle, and have increased gymnastic value on circles. The leg yield use as a balancing exercise enables the horse to remain supple and is a good way to teach the rider the variety of the aids, particularly in how you have to keep changing in order to have the horse stay the same in appearance throughout the movement. And of course you have, the Volte, Serpentine, Squares, and the ever popular, Transitions. Each bringing to the arena their own uses as movements and figures that when combined with each other and the Training Pyramid, will allow the rider to guide the horse through his advancement with harmony.

I think that de la Gueriniere summed up the USDF Program perfectly over 280 years ago when he said,

"Theory teaches us to base our work on sound principles and these principles, rather than being opposed to what is natural, must serve to perfect nature with the aid of art. Practice gives us the ability to easily apply what we have learned in theory. In order to attain this facility, one must like horses, be energetic and bold, and have abundant patience. Herein are the principle qualities of the true horseman." De la Gueriniere, Ecole de Cavalerie, 1731

If I was only allowed one thing from the Program to take away with me, it would be: A good teacher needs to sense the natural rhythms of learning in the student, be it equine or human, and respond accordingly. The act of teaching is discipline for the teacher as much as it is for the student.

In closing I would like to thank the Dressage Foundation for their generous grant that helped to make it possible for me to devote the time and energy to the undertaking the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program.

