

Riding and Much More!

Clinic Review of USDF Instructor/Trainer Program #2 – Riding

by Regina Sacha-Ujczco with photos by Dee Liebenthal

An ambitious group of eight earnest students (Participating Instructors – PI's) just completed the second Workshop in the triad of USDF Instructor/Trainer Programs hosted by NODA and held at Topline Stables at Walden in Aurora, OH. Workshop #1 was a comprehensive and challenging lungeing weekend. This second session was focused on riding and so much more! The third USDF Instructor/Trainer Certification Workshop is to be held in October, 2013 at Lake Erie College and will focus on Teaching.

The Riding Workshop was aptly led by USDF Certified Instructor and faculty member Bailey Cook from Carrboro, NC. Bailey is a USDF Silver medalist and Training through 4th level Certified Instructor. She began our weekend with a lecture and overview of the weekend expectations. Hopefully everyone completed the pre-session reading and e-Trak coursework to prepare for the required oral questions and discussion to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and ability to explain complex dressage theory. Do you know the difference between absolute vs. relative elevation in a horse? Or, perhaps you use the terms rhythm and tempo interchangeably! (Rhythm is the sequencing of the footfalls and tempo is the rate of repetition of the rhythm.) This is just a hint of the proficiency and exactness required to prepare for the ultimate USDF Certification process!

Bailey told us this “grass roots” educational opportunity appeals to three types of people. The first are those professionals who are eager to take the examination and become certified in Training through First Level, Second Level or Third and 4th Level. (USDF is currently creating an FEI Certification program.) The second group are young individuals hoping to build a professional training business and wishing to build their credentials. The third group are those Adult Amateurs who wish to expand their classical knowledge and riding and use this forum as an “uber” learning experience. Our workshop group was a mixture of the above with five Professionals and three Adult



Regina riding her own Arabella in the Riding Workshop held at Topline Stables

Amateurs. Also in attendance were a dedicated group of Auditors anxious to absorb the information and experiences of this unique and affordable educational experience.

In order to ride and therefore “train” a horse, it is essential to be able to make an accurate assessment of the horse’s current level of training, strengths and weaknesses. Knowing the Pyramid of Training Scale is essential for proper assessment and creation of a training plan. The first riding day we were able to ride a familiar horse of our choosing. Most people rode their own regular

mounts. However, more than just a “ride” was required. There is an initial impression of the horse prior to riding which includes the horse’s history, past training, soundness, fitness, etc. As a trainer, you must also evaluate conformation of top line, balance and symmetry. Even before the first “Warm-Up” riding phase, the trainer must perform a safety check of all the tack. Is the saddle and bit fitted properly? Are the boots or wraps placed correctly? After this safety check, the warm up then includes walk, trot and canter in both directions, using straight and curved lines, school figures and transitions. From this warm-up, one should be able to assess all aspects of the imperative Training Scale.

In the next “Working Phase” the rider must determine major areas needing improvement; identifying problems and causes. Then one must select appropriate exercises for improvement. For example, leg-yielding is a great suppling exercise and leads to two-track lateral work which aids collection. Breaks and rewards for the horse are essential for physical and mental reward and relaxation.

The “Cool Down” phase allows the horse to chew the reins out of the hands to stretch and elongate the topline. Care must be made to maintain balance and connection.

After this riding session, the PI’s were required to articulate to the examiner, PI’s and auditors, what was successful and why and possibly “why not!” What is the long-term training plan for the horse in the future?

USDF Workshop #2—Riding Education Committee Wrap-up

If this seems daunting, add to it the complexity of riding and evaluating an unfamiliar horse on day #2 and repeating all of the above after an hour lecture and discussion of homework questions. A few sample homework questions include the explanation of the principles of collection or the cause and fix for a four-beat canter.

Over the two days, auditors enjoyed wonderful hospitality and the ability to soak up knowledge from Bailey and each PI's ride and interaction.

Bailey clearly was friendly, confident in her approach, and insistent upon correctness and exactness. This is the only way to insure that the achievement of Certification is translated into a common approach vernacular for our dressage training in the United States. This USDF program is replete with knowledge and has been created for the proliferation of classical dressage knowledge and the assurance that there is a consistent and proven approach

to training, now and in the future.

At the end of riding day #2 each PI received a formal written evaluation which will also be forwarded to USDF. This will help to validate our own strengths and highlight where each PI should focus for future improvement.

I came into the USDF Certification Program quite by accident (as a fill in for a cancellation) but eagerly signed up for Workshop #2.

Now I am completely excited to prepare for the third and final Workshop #3 - Teaching. Whether you plan to teach or not, each time you sit on a horse you are "teaching" and the ability to verbalize and demonstrate the capabilities is the hallmark of knowledge and skills. You cannot teach what you do not know! It is said, "True riding mastery can only be reached by the person who, for years and years, has each day kept her mind open to new ideas, and even she should always be prepared to admit that there is still more to be learned."

Please consider auditing the next and final Workshop #3 (October 26 – 27) and obtaining USDF Lungeing, Training, and Teaching Manuals to further your own knowledge to impact your horses in developmental ways.

Never forget that the object of dressage is the harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse.

Happy harmony!

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On behalf of my co-chair and myself, I would like to thank **USDF Certified Instructor and Faculty member Bailey Cook** for her instruction, guidance and advice during the NODA sponsored USDF Instructor/Trainer Workshop #2-Riding, which was held the first weekend of August. Bailey provided insights into the certification testing process, homework questions, and put PI's on the spot to vocalize their training plan and reasons behind them.

Thank you to our Participating Instructors: Mary Armstrong, Christina Cardenas, Meghan Kelley, Janeen Langowski-Grava, Anne McClintock, Julie McElhaney, Regina Sacha-Ujczko and Carly Trimble. Christina and her groom, Lauren, traveled from Kentucky as a last minute replacement. Thank you Christina! The expectations and complexities of the certification process become more clear to all of us as we progress thru each workshop. As riders/trainers who rely on intuition and feel, the PI's were put in the hot seat and asked to verbalize their feelings and training plan. Kudos to them for putting themselves out there, in front of auditors and peers, as "pioneers" of the certification program in our community.

Special thanks to Janeen who was the hostess at her training facility, Topline Stables at Walden, as well as a PI. We appreciate the use of her beautiful facility and the extra work she did each day to accommodate us.

Continuing appreciation and gratitude to Barb Soukup who has been our scribe for the workshop series. Her integrity as well as judge's perspective have been an asset to our program.

Thank you to our Volunteers: Kathy Kirchner, Patti Valencic, Lauren Hunter and Dee Liebenthal. They were on hand throughout the weekend for any help that was needed.

The Instructor/Trainer Workshops are beneficial to all riders, giving us tools to become "thinking" riders and trainers. I would encourage everyone from professional to junior to attend the next workshop, "Training", to be held at the Lake Erie College, George M. Humphrey Equestrian Learning Center on October 26 and 27. You can register using the form on page 17 of this issue.

Thank you!

Berni Moauro and Marcia Doyle
NODA Education Committee Co-Chairs