

DRESSAGE FIX-A-TEST EDUCATION IN SMALL PIECES

by Amy Bresky

Each New Year's Day, I am not one of the people not watching a football game and/or nursing a hangover, and help out as secretary and scorer at the Dressage Fix-A-Test at Jeanette Van Mill's Dutchfield Farm in Aberdeen, NC. Jeanette has a lovely facility with two sand rings, so it is perfect for this kind of activity. After having to cancel last year because of inclement weather, it is happening again on January 1, 2014.

For those not familiar with what a Fix-A-Test (or Ride-Review-Ride, as it is also known) is, it is a highly educational activity for dressage/event riders of all levels. It is an opportunity to ride a dressage test of your choice (including the new 2014 eventing tests) in front of a recognized judge, have your ride scored, then the judge comes into the arena and works with you on the elements of the test that need the most work. This part takes about 15 minutes and then you have the option to call it a day, or come back after a short break and ride the test again with your new-found knowledge. It is a relaxed atmosphere with casual attire and great comraderie. Kris Hamilton of Raeford was the judge two years ago and will be returning this year.

I am an upper level dressage rider, who also enjoys eventing and trail riding (no DQ here) and two years ago I began the day expecting a rather quiet time just doing simple math scoring. Boy, was I wrong. From the minute I sat behind Kris, and she started helping riders from Introductory to Fourth Level, I found that she had many great short sayings that got right to the heart of the matter. I started scribbling them down around the perimeter of my schedule sheet. About halfway through the day, I realized there were more than enough to inspire any rider at any level or discipline. I hope you find one or two, or more, that you can hold with you to help your riding every day.

“Create ease of movement first, before anything else.” This was the basic tenet for the riders trying so hard to ride every detail that they had lost their forward momentum and relaxation. Kris was always willing to take the work down to whatever level needed to develop rhythm and ease of moment before adding anything else.

“He needs to carry you, not you doing all the work”, with its corollary, **“If he does twice as much, then you can do 2 times less.”** Not only did this encourage riders of sluggish horses to create that ease of movement but gave them the freedom to realize that they could do more with less effort, once the energy was created. Once the energy is there, this one made such sense, **“Just ride, don't get in the way of it.”**

“If you can fix it, you can prevent it.” These few words empowered riders to realize that if they had the ability to improve a problem once it had happened, they could then take that knowledge to the next step to help stop it from starting.

“If you add more go to bad steering, then you just have more bad steering.” This one got a lot of chuckles but was right to the point for riders to understand that no one part of the equation works without the other.

“If he goes hollow, don’t follow.”, and its converse for a stuck horse, **“Let him know that he can go out there”**, were pieces of the important bigger thought, **“The moment something gets hard, that’s the moment training begins.”** For some riders, this meant thinking about themselves a little differently to start the transition from rider as passenger to rider as an emerging trainer.

Tucked in between the more specific gems, there were the big concepts that we can all hold on to. I think you’ll find these will continue to develop more meaning all the way through your riding education.

“Defend your thoroughness.” Kris attributed these valuable but a little hard to grasp words to Henk Van Bergen. She had lots of related phrases and she added these to make it clearer; **“Have belief in your contact.”** and **“Keep inviting it.”**.

“The truth lives in our seat”. This well-worded sentence reminded riders at every level that our seats are the core of our communication with our horses, and is a big piece of the path to defending that thoroughness.

By the end of the day, I found I could remember many of these short phrases. I have since found I can call them up to evaluate what I am doing and help me think through the inevitable sticky moments. What a treat to be able to do it all over again this year (please cooperate, Mother Nature!) Information and entry forms are available at Dutchfield Farm’s website, dutchfieldfarm.com.