

Lessons in Classical Dressage and Working Equitation

Want to learn Dressage or Working Equitation? Do you want a horse that is light, supple and responsive? Do you want to improve you and your horse's dressage or WE abilities? Do you want a horse started correctly?

For the Horse:

I work with horses the way the old masters did. My focus is on educating the horse through kindness, balance and relaxation. I focus first on getting jaw mobility to teach the horse relaxation and that contact with the bit is positive communication. I then work in-hand to teach the horse how to go into contact while maintaining jaw mobility, how to self-relax, and how to follow the bit for neck placement. In addition, while in-hand, I also teach the horse how to have impulsion forward to the bit with correct posture. Under saddle I continue with jaw mobility, neck extensions, correct posture, and lateral & longitudinal suppling and flexions. I teach forward impulsion using the concept of "legs without hands, hands without legs" so concepts are very clear for the horse. Initially the use of aids are bigger but I work on decreasing the size of the aids until they are feather light while also incorporating the subtle use of the seat as a refinement aid; although minimally as a quiet seat is always required as the basic position for the rider. The horse learns that the leg aids are to initiate an action, cease an action, or cause a direction change only while the rein aids ask for direction, capture or release energy, guide the shoulders, and maintain the delicate balance of "through-ness" in the horse's body from back to front. These aids ultimately encourage the horse to work in self propulsion and freedom which actually allows us to release the aids to achieve full lightness and balance in free-will. This creates a horse that is eager to learn, happy, and with much self-expression.

I find that when communication is clear and simple, and the process is slow initially, the horse learns quickly and progresses rapidly.

Under saddle I also work on balance using the concept of position before movement. In the beginning, both in-hand and under saddle, I teach the horse how to distribute his weight equally on all four legs, then how to rebalance his weight back to his haunches while lifting his withers. Lateral flexibility and suppleness are obtained through curved figures, two track work, and counter bends while longitudinal flexibility and suppleness is obtained through transitions in and out of gaits, within gaits, and with rein-back work.

For the Rider:

For the rider I teach how to do the jaw flexions and in-hand work on their own horses so this can be regularly maintained. I show how to watch for subtle balance shifts to help the rider teach their horse proper posture from the ground and how to get the horse to follow the bit with neck extensions.

While in the saddle, I work on a rider's position for proper posture, teach how to use the rider's core to create independent hands, and do work at slower gaits to create the habit of using hands and legs independently. I also help the rider work on having fixed hands that always maintain a soft contact with the horse while never pulling back. Work is done using figures, objects to focus on and work around, occasional tools to assist better hand stability, and transition in and within the gaits. It's important to me that a rider learns to "feel" when their horse is soft, relaxed, and "through" from back to front so the focus is on finding that feeling starting with in-hand work and progressing through the gaits while mounted. It's through our own proper and balanced position, strength of core, firmness in our bodies, and steadiness in our hands and legs that we create a horse that can freely move under us.