

Spanish Riding School Bereiter Herbert Seiberl Clinic

A Journey of Graceful Communication By Jorie Sligh www.dressageclinics.org

Blue skies, comfortable temperatures, and the hospitable atmosphere of Blue Water Dressage Stables were a perfect backdrop for what was to be a memorable educational experience for auditors and riders attending the July 19 – 22, 2008 dressage clinic with Spanish Riding School Bereiter Herbert Seiberl.

Most people would probably agree that, regardless of the sport or subject, there are a few commonalities that differentiate a good instructor from a superior instructor. These character traits and teaching styles can help make a student's learning experience an unforgettable one as

ability to articulate concepts so the student understands what the instructor is trying to convey; and has a vast amount of patience.

Herbert exhibits all of these qualities, and then goes beyond that with the fine nuances that elevate him to the status of a superior teacher. He has a genuine passion and love for horses and riding that come through in his teaching, and he is sincerely committed to helping people become better riders.

He is so patient, encouraging and kind, while at the same time holding riders to a high standard and making sure that basics are correct before progressing up the levels. He also has great insight and ability to determine the issues that a horse and rider have, and what to do to correct them. In addition, his sense of humor and ability to put people at ease make it easy to relax and ride with him.

He is wonderful at conveying concepts that can be intangible and difficult to understand until one has experienced them repeatedly... half-halts and a connection with a horse that is through and on the bit come to mind.

There were too many concepts and movements worked on and improved



Pam Atkinson on her Lipizzan stallion, Pluto II Samara

Under the patient and careful guidance of Bereiter Seiberl, horses and riders underwent beautiful transformations as a matter of course. Riders and auditors wrote glowing comments in the clinic evaluations and talked enthusiastically about what they had experienced and seen, and after the clinic, I reflected on what it is about Herbert that elicits this type of reaction.

opposed to merely a good one.

Obviously needed are an in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject, and a high degree of skill so that they can demonstrate what they teach. Herbert's expertise, coming as it does from the Spanish Riding School's 430+ years of experience and dedication to classical horsemanship, has been refined into a system that turns out some of the best riders and horses in the world. It's also important that the instructor has the

during the clinic to cover in this article, so I'll write a little about connection.

mean loose reins, or virtually no contact.

the reins-- for the first time in our history together. Herr Seiberl's instruction is precise, to the point, & extremely effective."

Herbert acknowledged that stronger aids are sometimes needed to get the desired response from the horse.

"Soft aids are great and perfect. But when there is no response, you must be clearer and give the aid a bit more strongly. It doesn't mean pulling or hitting, it means pulling saying clearly, "this is what I want you to do."

Pulling is something that Herbert immediately works on correcting. Regardless of the level of the horse or the movement being done, the message was the same. For trot-walk transitions with a horse who had a tendency to fall on his forehead: "Don't pull... when you pull, you lose his neck, you lose his back, and his head goes in the air."



Ivan & Mirage focus on collecting the canter & keeping a steady tempo so that their changes flow more smoothly.

To a rider who was having difficulty with a mare avoiding connection, he said, "You have to show her the way... forward, stretching downward, through the neck, on the bit. You need good connection on the outside rein, and then you can give a soft and fast vibration on the inside rein. When she is through, then you can hold your hands still and keep a soft contact. Then before her head comes up, give a few more soft vibrations on the inside rein."

Herbert repeatedly stressed to all of the riders how important it was to develop a soft and trusting connection with the horse's mouth. Sometimes riders can interpret "soft contact" to

"There's a big difference between soft contact and sloppy reins. You need contact, but a soft contact," he said, demonstrating the difference between a connection that a horse is comfortable with and can trust, and one that is inconsistent and disappearing/unsteady.

One rider wrote in her evaluation, "I've taken two of Herr Seiberl's clinics now, both on borrowed horses. After each clinic I experienced an immediate and dramatic improvement in my riding on my own horse. After the first clinic I noticed a huge increase in the stability of my seat, and after the second clinic I was able to maintain a beautiful contact with my horse's mouth-- neither pulling nor "throwing away"



Elise Freed and Atlas working on canter departs

him a little rounder. Prepare with the outside rein - give a half-halt with the outside rein one stride, two strides, breathe out, and transition. If you do it his way every time, soon you can be very soft and when you breathe out like that, your horse will understand that you want him to walk."



Herbert helping Jorie and Pam Atkinson's Brandenburg work on one-tempis..- (Leslie Sligh photo)

For canter-walk transitions, the method was similar: "Prepare him for two strides. When his poll is at the highest point, collect him with the outside rein... collect him, collect him, breathe out, and walk. When you feel his haunches are under him, both hands say 'walk'.

This is where the systematic teaching of the SRS is especially apparent: Regardless of the level of the horse and rider, forward, straight, and calm are essential, and the progression to higher level

movements develops naturally following the development of lower level movements. Correct canter-walk transitions lead to flying changes. Correct shoulder-in leads to half-pass, etc.

Throughout the lessons, Herbert's instructions were given in an encouraging, calm manner and sprinkled with, "No problem!" when mistakes were made, and "You have time" when people were getting tense. This makes for a very receptive learning mood and a relaxed environment in which to learn.



Herbert explaining a concept to Melissa while B.J. checks out the happenings outside.

He works the horse and rider hard, but somehow keeps it from being

stressful, especially when the rider is having difficulty.

One rider, who is also a professional trainer and instructor, commented on her evaluation, "I had a great time and learned a lot. I thought

Herbert was very patient and should be an example for professionals...that you can teach in a kind, gentle manner and still be effective and get the message through to the student."

Agreed another, who is an adult amateur, "Every horse and rider team improved with each lesson. Herbert's mastery and timing, combined with his kind and quiet encouragement, provided the perfect environment for concentrated learning. I was able to go home and continue improving on my own. I feel my riding went to a new level. I feel very fortunate to have been able to ride with Herbert,

and I hope to do so again."

The auditors appreciated the fact that Herbert "rides" the entire lesson

with the student. He is giving feedback and commenting virtually every stride, and therefore the

auditors can understand exactly what is being addressed.

One auditor wrote, "I got something useful from each ride. He adapts his teaching to each rider's ability – not only how they ride, but how they learn."

Needless to say, I'm delighted that Herbert will be coming back to Michigan for two clinics in January. Those of us facing five+ months of grey skies, snow, and cold really appreciate the inspiration and motivation that riding with Herbert

provides!

More pictures from this and other SRS clinics and information about upcoming SRS clinics can be found at www.dressageclinics.org, or call or e me at 616.283.4741 or jorie@dressageclinics.org.

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