

2011 Training Grant by Pam Sellers

I chose to put my £50 training grant towards a weekend away at a British Dressage Training Camp. It was held at The College, Keysoe during the last weekend in April.

Lucienne and I travelled to Keysoe on the Friday afternoon of the Royal Wedding. Keysoe have plenty of stabling and once Lu was settled in her box and I had sorted out my sleeping bag I went to register and collect my timetable for the training for Saturday.

The next morning Lu, having spent a good night in strange surroundings, and I had a lesson with Jenny Ward. Jenny, a list 1 dressage judge, selector for team GB, watched us warming up in walk trot and canter decided we would work on leg yield. We did this firstly in trot followed next in canter. The emphasis was that the inside hind leg travelled forwards and under rather than across and under, with only a very slight bend away from the direction of travel. I had to then ask for more throughness, (think medium trot). This felt very good.

Then we moved onto Shoulder In. Once the correct angle was established I was again asked to add more power to the trot.

Short walk to regain our breath!

Next, working canter on 20 metre circle doing canter – trot –canter transitions. Continuing on the 20 metre circle but in trot I was asked to collect the trot for a few steps when crossing the centre lines and then back to working trot. I had to ease the inside rein, not give it away though and use half halts with the outside rein when Lu got a bit keen.

All the while Jenny corrected my position. She had me sitting taller and I really had to pull my tummy in and keep it there whilst still breathing. I was amazed at the effect this had on Lu especially in the canter which at the moment is not our strongest pace.

We ended the session with 5 minutes of stretching down in trot and then a short discussion about where work was needed. Jenny emphasised that it takes a long time for a horse to develop its muscles with the need for a systemised training programme.

After a quick lunch I was off to an unmounted lecture with Lee Harris from Equetouch. Lee is a human and equine physiotherapist who works with team GB. He carried out a series of tests to establish my flexibility, especially in the pelvis, hips and knees as well as the muscle groups associated those areas. Fortunately he found I had no major problems but would benefit from a stronger core so need to work on my abdominal muscles. He then showed me some relevant exercises.

Also on the Saturday I had to ride Elementary 53 in front of James Burtwell.

As well as these sessions I was able to watch others having training. These ranged from young horses and novice riders working at Prelim to advanced horses doing PSG. One trainer there, who unfortunately I didn't have a lesson with was Nick Turner. He was doing gymnastic exercises with poles. His layout of the poles is something I have since tried at home and find very beneficial.

On the Saturday evening mounted entertainment was organised. We watched 3 different advanced horses working and performing to music which is a passion of mine so I found that very interesting.

Sunday morning I had another unmounted lecture with Lee Harris from Equetouch, this time with a horse. He pinpointed areas of the horse where there was tension in the muscles. He explained that as horses develop through their work that different muscle groups often have issues that need addressing. As the dressage horse begins to transfer his weight to the hindquarters through collection work it is those muscles and the hamstring in particular that can become tight. We practised massage techniques. Effleurage, petrissage and kneading were the main actions that I learned as well as stretches for the hamstrings.

Without much time for a breather I was on to my next mounted lesson, this time with Jo Swain who runs Swallowfield Equestrian Centre. Jo is very involved with BD training with the central region. Again it was lateral work we began with, turning down the centre line and leg yielding to the outer track. We also did this exercise in canter. Lu and I hadn't done this before and it was easier than I thought it was going to be. Jo explained that because of the moment of suspension the horses find it easier to *jump* forwards and sideways. Then we moved onto canter on a 20 metre circle. I had to collect the canter for few strides and then go back to a working canter. This was very beneficial and Jo made me be very very strict with Lu and to be daring. A couple of times she broke into trot but soon started to get the idea. As well, I managed to be sensitive enough to keep the *canter on the spot feeling* for quite a few steps before allowing her back to the working canter. At the end of this Lu felt wonderful but tired! Me too.

I had about an hour and a half before my final lesson which was with Jenny Ward again. Jenny got back to correcting my position and we also worked on getting Lu to be softer and more responsive to my half halt aids. I had to ride them less from my hand and leg and more from my body and seat. A lot of the trot work was done in sitting trot but I must say I found this work easier to do that way. To finish the session and the weekend we did work on the walk. Jenny said Lu had a good walk but I needed to make more of it. I need to think of a good clear rhythm and maintain it. I have a tendency to hold her in too much so must ease the hand enough but not let go of the contact. In the extended walk again I hold her in and her frame must lengthen but stay in the same rhythm. The free walk again stays in rhythm but the poll should ideally be lower than the wither with Lu seeking the rein down and nose in front of the vertical and still on a light contact.

Remembering to say thank you to the organisers, I packed everything up tidily and Lu and I made our way back to Rutland exhausted. I had a great experience and would definitely go again if I have the opportunity. British Dressage put on a weekend with fabulous trainers in the lovely facilities at Keysoe. The caterers there served food from 7am until the last person left. The stabling was good and my horse was very happy and settled whilst there and I was very proud of her. She behaved perfectly and felt very grown up.