

Alison Pepper and Grouse

I was really pleased when I won one of the training bursary's at the riding club AGM. This was the kick start I needed! Having had a difficult three years of stop start riding & competing due to a persistent knee problem, & having had to undergo three painful operations with little to nothing being achieved each time & each requiring a long layoff & slow return to riding & fitness. Ultimately in May 2008 it was decided that the only course of action was to have a full knee replacement. I was told I really ought to give up riding, but if I insisted I would be able to ride & compete in dressage, despite this I was determined to get going again.

Finally in September last year I was given permission to start riding again on the flat & hacking, all the consultant said was I could do as I liked as long as I didn't fall off, no pressure there then! As I slowly got going on a new horse & gradually we both got fitter I began to believe that I might be able to get myself going & even do some jumping again, so when I knew there was a Matt Lanni show jumping clinic planned for early January I determined to make this my first goal.

The week before the clinic I took the mare to Julie Coope who I go to for regular training & she had a couple of sessions jumping her for me so that at least Grouse wasn't as rusty as me by the Saturday. The clinic was divided into two groups of three for one & a half hours each group. Matt also prefers it if everyone goes for the full session so that while not riding yourself you are observing the other group as he says you can learn a lot this way; also he doesn't have to explain everything twice! Initially Matt explained the importance of making sure you have the correct canter, you always need to be on a forward stride with enough pace, & well balanced as this is what makes everything slot into place, if the horse is in front of your leg then it is easy to maintain rhythm & balance & make any adjustments –this is the theory!! We spent quite a while trying to get the correct pace before Matt introduced some fences to work on & demonstrate the value of getting this right, we then finished by jumping some combinations & putting together 5 or 6 fences to prove the value of what we had learnt. All the horses & riders seemed to benefit from the exercises & by the end of the session I think we all felt a huge improvement had been made. Personally I actually felt that after all I may still be able to compete & ride properly even at my age & with a dodgy knee!

The second session with Matt was about six weeks later & there were 4 of us in this clinic. We continued to build from the previous session, concentrating on showing us how to alter stride patterns from the basic forward canter. He started with some canter pole work & made us work hard on this until he felt we were foot perfect. Then he built some fairly small fences on a square so that we had to keep our line correct & our turns accurate to maintain balance & fluency, varying the intervals to make us make necessary adjustments & to make us think about the turns being accurate to ensure you didn't break stride pattern which he said was invaluable when riding courses. Matt then built us a course to finish with so that we could all show off our new skill!! Another really good session.

Encouraged by these two clinics & with yet more help from Julie Coope, I managed to complete my intro competition finishing on my dressage score for 5th place.

