



Dressage education follows a year-round, life-long calendar.

by Nan Meek

Why do we think about “back to school” in September when the new school year almost always begins in August? Isn’t August considered vacation month?

School, learning, education – it’s always a good month to learn something new, and I was fortunate to have just spent the past weekend learning a lot about my favorite subject of dressage.

For two days, I played sponge and absorbed as much as I could from George Williams, US Dressage Youth Coach, USDF President, and someone whose own education I envy. He studied at the Reitinstitut von Neindorff in Karlsruhe, Germany, worked with and alongside Karl Mikolka at Tempel Farms here in the US for 20 years, and trained in Germany with Olympic gold medalist Klaus Balkenhol, former US Dressage Team Coach.

This experience served as a welcome reminder of the importance of lifelong learning.

Prepare to Learn

“Do your homework” is something every parent tells their children, but it applies equally to adults who want to get the most from their own educational experiences.

In the weeks leading up to this clinic, I combed through old issues of dressage magazines for articles about George and his training methods. I reread Egon von Neindorff, *The Art of Classical Horsemanship*. I watched videos of Klaus Balkenhol and his Olympic partner Goldstern, and re-read his open letter to the FEI in which he and a list of co-signers that reads like the “who’s who” of international equestrian sport had protested the practice of rollkur (hyperflexion) and advocated “for the good of the horses and the continued good repute of international equestrian sport.”

Was that overkill for a two-day dressage clinic? Not for me. It gave me a frame of reference for what I hoped to see and learn, a perspective about the importance of the principles of dressage and a reminder that even the basics – especially the basics – of dressage really matter. They are the foundation for the training upon which a dressage horse’s life is built.

I wanted to learn as much as possible from this clinician, so I did my homework.

Engage Eyes & Ears

Some people are more visual learners, while others learn better from reading and writing. If you know which style of learner you are, it makes your choice of note taking technique much easier and more productive, whether you prefer to take photos, hand write notes or record in sound, video or text on a digital device.

September 2018 - Back to School

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Thursday, 30 August 2018 03:36

