

TRAINING, BOARDING & BUYING

Adjustability lessons are a take-away of SAHJA session with top horseman.

by Karine Brooks

Every year the Sacramento Area Hunter Jumper Association offers an educational clinic to its members. This year, the clinic took place at the beautiful Starr Vaughn Equestrian in Elk Grove and was free to 36 lucky SAHJA members, with the help of fundraising and an educational grant from the USA Equestrian Trust.



I have been a SAHJA board member for two years and am currently the vice president and am in charge of the educational committee. I was thrilled when Mark Leone was available to come teach our clinic this year. With his expertise and charismatic personality I knew it would make for a great learning experience.

The first day of each session, Mark spent time with us on the flat, offering comments on making our position better while getting our horses warmed up. He had us trot in our half-seat to get our heels deeper and noticed that my left leg tended to be slightly farther back than my right, suggesting I sink deeper in my left heel.

To set up adjustability in our horses, he set up three canter poles about four strides apart and had us canter the first pole, trot the second and canter out over the third. This really got our horses listening to our aids and made them adjustable for the next exercises.



We moved on to some trot fences and gymnastic work. He would adjust each exercise to help the individual horse jump better and set the riders up for success. Mark had us start by trotting a fence and halting on a line or doing a canter-to-trot transition after the fence to focus on the horse's straightness and control of stride. We then did a canter in one stride to a one-stride set on the shorter side.

For horses that over-jumped, he rolled the ground line out away from the jump to back the horse off and get them thinking about their front end. Moving on to a four-stride to a four-stride that were set on the same distances we had to adjust our rides to come forward for the first four, then wait for the second four. This is where the pole exercise came in handy as my horse was very adjustable and listening to my leg and hand.

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