

On the first day of the Robert Dover Horsemastership Clinic, riders and auditors arrived bright and early, eager to learn. The day officially began with participants busily feeding horses and finishing barn chores to be on time for the 7:00 workout. We worked with trainer Bob Gutowitz. Starting with a series of stretches, the workout consisted of a mix of cardio, strength, and agility. It is very important to stress the physical fitness of the rider because if we are training the horses to be athletes, we must be true athletes as well. After the workout, Robert Dover gave an incredible talk on "The Art of Dressage". He reviewed with us the groups of aids and how they work to harmoniously create a half halt within the period of a single breath. The rider uses the driving aids which are the left leg, right leg, and seat to, of course, send the horse forward while using the bending aids of the inside leg, outside leg, and inside rein to create bend. The outside rein, or rein of opposition, counteracts these two groups of aids to keep the horse in balance. Robert discussed how while doing a half halt, the rider's inhale is the dictation of the aids, and the exhale is the reward for listening to the rider. The half halt also enables the rider to balance the horse in such a way that tempo, stride length, frame, and rhythm are easily controlled. After Robert's talk, lessons began. The two clinicians today were Robert Dover and Shelly Francis, my ride was with Robert. At the very beginning of my lesson, Robert discussed with me the importance of having the ability to perform a half halt to create a balanced horse that has the ability to do any movement at any moment. We started the ride by walking on a circle with half halts at four points. The goal was to activate my horse, Valencio, in such a way that his croup lowered, his shoulders raised, and his center of gravity was pushed further back. We then did this same exercise at the trot and canter. Once I had the ability to create subtle half halts, we moved on to the "Rubber Band Exercise". This exercise is a great exercise to activate the horse and have him listening to the rider. It consists of half of the 20 meter circle being in an extended gait followed by a half halt and then the following centerline has three or four steps of extreme collection followed by another half halt. One idea that really helped me was to think of the aids for the medium and extended gaits while in the collection to keep the activity. By the end of the ride, Valencio was balanced and it was an incredible feeling. Shelly focused on the ability to control the tempo every single stride and used lateral movements to help achieve this. One exercise I really liked was having the rider bring a horse back from an extension in shoulder in. The rider would start the shoulder in before the end of the extension and end the extension in shoulder in to keep the horse narrow behind and straight in the body. After a lunch break, the clinic participants gathered in the Van Kampen indoor arena to listen to Robert discuss the Art of Dressage further. Robert began with questions and dove even deeper into discussing the ability to use the various aids and the importance of using the voice as a reward while riding. It is important to make sure the horse wants to work for the rider. The participants feed and completed the barn chores to finish the day. It was an incredible first day and we are so fortunate to have the ability to learn from such incredible trainers and have access to such a wonderful facility. -Cassie Schmidt

Day 1: Lesson with Shelly Francis

Bright and early this morning: 6:15 AM, before the sun was out, it was to the barn for taking care of the horses before our 7 AM group workout. Most people were all moved in from yesterday afternoon. As expected, morning stables consisted of feeding, walking, and watering our horses and cleaning stalls. Then it was time for the real fun to start-- the workout.

Just as the sun rose, riders and auditors headed over to the arena for a fitness session with personal trainer Bob Gutowitz. When I heard the sessions were thirty minutes I thought oh, how bad could that really be? Well it was tough. That thirty minutes consisted of running, frog jumps, lunges, barrel races, pushups-- all in the sand. Between the hard workout and the morning Florida humidity (that I, coming from California, am certainly not accustomed to), I was drenched in sweat at the end of those thirty minutes. But there was no time to rest. It was a quick check in on the horses before heading off to a lecture by Robert Dover.

Robert's talk was on dressage theory. He said that if there was only one lesson we took away from the clinic, it was this one: the three basic groups of aids. Robert's theory is that an aid has to prove that it is an aid by individually producing the result or some degree of the result, which you desired of the horse. For example, the first set of aids is the driving aids. These are made up of the left leg, the right leg, and the seat. These are their own aids because if you were to apply any of these aids as your sole aid, you would produce some aspect of "driving" the horse, or going forward. If you were to only kick with your left leg, sure, the horse might move sideways, but it would also likely move forward. The seat is also an effective driving aid. There are three types of seats-- the passive seat, such as your seat would be while sitting in a chair, the active seat, which is what one uses to drive the horse, and the stilled, or braced, seat, which is used to slow the horse down. In order to activate your seat, Robert said that you must inhale. He focused a lot on breathing, actually. It activates your core and gives your seat the "power" it needs to be a driving aid.

The next set of aids is the bending aids. These three aids are the inside leg, the outside leg, and the inside rein. Like the driving aids, each of these aids can singlehandedly create some aspect of bend in the horse. When bending, the inside leg should be at the girth because it is the horse's center of gravity and is where the horse will bend from. The outside leg should be slightly behind the girth so that the haunches do not fall out. To create the bend all the way through the neck, the inside rein is closed into a fist.

This brings us to the third set of aids, which is actually just one aid. It is the one thing that has yet to be mentioned-- the outside rein. It is known as the aid of opposition because its purpose is to oppose the driving and bending aids. The outside rein keeps the horse from going too fast when you drive it, and it keeps the horse from spinning in circles when you create bend with your inside rein.

These three sets of aids together begin to create rhythm and tempo, and through those the horse will begin to develop balance. These aids together create the beauty of the ever sought after "half-halt". Robert defined a half-halt as "the calling of the horse to a perfect state of balance and attention". When the horse has mastered the half-halt, the dressage moves are easy and effortless; they are simply tricks for the

horse in balance and at attention to go through.

The next part of the day was the lessons. Two lessons were going on simultaneously (the facility is amazing! Two dressage courts fit in the indoor with room to spare). The instructors today were Robert Dover and Shelly Francis. I was the first rider of the day with Shelly. I am riding a borrowed horse: his name is Sunny and his owner Holly Chernoff so generously has let me ride him this week. I had only ridden him once, so I was a little nervous. The instructors are really understanding of those of us riding horses we aren't used to and Shelly was extremely nice. A few things I learned in my lesson today--

- Sunny can be a bit insensitive to the leg, especially in the canter. When the canter got slow, she told me to ride the full beat of the canter and really push the third beat through. Also, instead of giving him a boot with my leg, which he wasn't exceptionally responsive to, she told me to "hug him" with my leg for a full stride to send him forward. I found that to be really effective.
- When coming back from the extended trot on a horse that likes to brace, she had me ride it by setting up for the turn rather than pulling back. When he got stuck, she had me bend him and put him in slight shoulder-fore to keep him laterally supple and stepping under behind without bracing against my hand.
- In the walk, Sunny can sometimes get a bit lateral. When this happened, Shelly had me slow down the walk and ride it in a bit of shoulder-in. This helped the walk a lot.

Since I was the first rider, I got to spend the rest of the day watching Shelly and Robert teach. I could ramble on for pages and pages about all the things I learned from them both; watching is just as valuable a part of the clinic as riding. I will be including bits of what I have learned every day, so I will just give a short summary of things I learned from both of them.

Shelly talked a lot about positioning and rhythm. She was big on accuracy of the shapes of circles, the positioning of the horse before the halfpass, and keeping the rhythm of the trot in the lateral work. On a horse that liked to get a bit braced in front, she had the rider do a 20 meter circle in haunches-in where she was able to control the hind end while working on keeping his neck soft and not bracing against the rider.

Robert emphasized that he "taught one lesson all day". That "one lesson" that was emphasized with every rider was the proper half-halt, as was talked about in our theory lesson. He also said on many occasions that you should "feel the extended gait in the collected gait", meaning that if you are in a collected trot, you should feel that you have the power and electricity in the gait to go into an extended at any second during the collected movement and that you should be able to collect out of any extended movement. He enforced this by having many of the riders ride extensions in all movements, such as shoulder-ins and half-passes. He spent a lot of time working just on the circle working medium and collect. I will have much more to say on Robert's teaching tomorrow, when I have my lesson with him!

After rides and a quick lunch provided by the clinic (thank you EDAP!), we had another lecture with Robert, although this took more of a question and answer format. Robert told stories of his own experiences, answered questions about people's individual horses, and kept coming back to the core lesson of the day-- the half-halt. He also addressed the question that many dressage riders have at some point-- where does the money come from? Robert's answer was that you have to work your butt off, earn it, take every opportunity you can get, and maybe, if you're lucky and in the right place at the right time, you'll end up with that one more that will turn your career around.

After another break to take care of the horses for the night, Dr. Mary Beth Gordon spoke to us about horse nutrition. We learned how to do a body condition scoring for our horses and how to use a weight tape, and how the results of those effects how much our horses should eat. Horses should be fed two percent of their body weight in hay per day, and a thousand pound horse should get about 4 pounds of grain per day to get the added nutrients and protein that performance horses need. Also, joint supplements have been proven to be of benefit to horses in work. These are all the things that are so important for riders to know; for a horse to perform at its best, it needs to be cared for to the best of our abilities. The horse always comes first!

Finally, we finished up the night with an awesome pizza dinner where some young professionals came and talked to us about their experience moving into the professional world. Among these professionals were Liz Austin, Meagan Davis and Olympian Adrienne Lyle. It was great to get their insight on the business and what it is really like in the professional world. It was a great end to a great day.

And now it is early to bed to get ready to do it all again tomorrow! -Jamie Pestana

First day of the EDAP clinic!

My favorite clinic of course is the EDAP clinic! With five days packed with things to do, ranging from riding to our own fitness program!

For this clinic we are all required to be at the horse show grounds by the latest 6:30am to feed and take care of our horses, such as walking or in my case having a grey horse means those joyful 6 am baths!

From there we continued to our 7am fitness with Bob. For everyone who knows me I am a fitness geek! I love the feeling of every muscle being completely sore! Well Bob does just that for everyone! We did our running and our frog leaps (which are the most painful) and even wheelbarrows!

After our fitness we were rewarded with a lecture from Robert Dover! Robert primarily talked about the building blocks of training.

For the rest of the morning I watched Robert and Shelly Francis teach. For me watching makes me want to ride and watching good riders such as the ones today make me feel inspired to try different ways of going about my own riding.

Today I worked with Shelly Francis with Idolo. Hampton Green owns Idolo and I

have been lucky enough for the past year to have a partnership with him! Idolo can be a bit tricky and Shelly really helped me work through inconsistencies in the contact by keeping my hands lower! Such a simple thing yet it made such a huge difference! We then worked a little on the changes; he really likes to swing his hunches to the inside when we change. Shelly had me really riding him in almost shoulder fore to the outside to prevent him from swinging away from me.

After a morning of fantastic lessons we had a question and answer with Robert Dover. -Rachel Chowanec

Wellington is filled with amazing equestrian facilities around every corner. The nice warm air and the multitude of shows available are just a few of the reasons so many riders come to Wellington for the winter. On January 2nd, the 3rd annual Robert Dover Horsemanship Clinic began started the day off with fitness training with trainer Bob Gutowitz where we begin to engage our core and muscles that need to be developed in order to ride effectively. Then we were honored to have Robert Dover talk to us about the basis of the art of Dressage that is required for all success. He emphasized how going forward is the first requirement of a broken horse. The forward motion is established by the driving aids, which are the seat, left leg, and right leg. In every lesson he addressed the importance of the half halt, which is the calling of the horse to the perfect state of balance and attention.. He organized each lesson similarly by using what he called the rubber band exercise where riders would work on a 20 meter circle and at one end of the circle they would extend in order to engage the hind legs and collect more. Next, Robert Dover gave a great Q & A session and then continued informing us on the art of dressage. Then towards the evening, Dr. Mary Beth Gordon, an Equine Nutritionist, talked to us about ways to figure out if a horse is fit or fat, by using measuring tape then examining the amount of fat it has in certain areas of its body. Next we weighed the hay and grain to see how to measure the correct amount for each horse. Then to close the wonderful first day, some of Lendon Gray's previous students were kind enough to take time to talk to us about their journey as a rider and the work and effort put in to make it all happen. Overall, the main message was that you have show how much you want it (success) in order to achieve it. All of their stories were very inspiring and we are all grateful for the time and effort Lendon Gray, Robert Dover, Shelly Francis and all of the speakers and sponsors put in to make this first day truly amazing! I know from here it will only get better, and as Robert Dover says, "you are only one half halt away from perfection!"

-Allison Hopkins