

2010 USDF Region 7 Adult Clinic with Charlotte Bredahl-Baker

“The Quest of the Pyramid”

What a treat! My Dutch FEI horse, Kai and I were chosen to participate in the USDF Adult clinic series led by Charlotte Bredahl-Baker.

During his extensive showing career, Kai has been a USDF and CDS champion. We have earned Horse of the Year titles at Training through 4th levels, Prix St. George and Intermediare 1 and he is schooling all the Grand Prix. It was a serious selection process with a three page application with the goal being to help Charlotte demonstrate the structure, necessity and benefits of the Training Scale (often referred to as a ‘pyramid’).



Welcoming the learning opportunity, our trek to the beautiful facility at Starr Vaughn Equestrian Center in Elk Grove unfortunately began in a down pour. Driving north Friday- in what was a torrent of rain - I’ve never driven my rig so slowly attempting to see the road. Fortunately, the November weekend turned into a fantastic, dry one, albeit a serious chill came along with the sunshine.

As an experienced International trainer and competitor and FEI judge, Charlotte is extremely knowledgeable. She teaches in a friendly style with concern for the welfare of the horse. With positive comments she pushed the riders to improve, always keeping the basics of regularity and rhythm, suppleness, connection to the bit and impulsion as the priority for the two days. As I watched a few of the horses struggle with a particular movement, Charlotte would immediately address and correct the loss of the basics and only then would have the rider try the movement again.



Kai warmed up both days really well. Despite the strong, cold wind, he came out supple and loose, rhythmic and regular – the foundation of the ‘pyramid’! He **allowed** me to ride him - not always his top priority! So right away, Charlotte was able to have us go right into the movements of the PSG.

Starting with the trot half passes and progressing to the extended trot, her comment was ‘it’s all nice’. “Nice” she said, is enough for a ‘7’ but why not go for the ‘9’? So I tried – I added the power (impulsion) she wanted

and Kai responded! And - we lost some thoroughness (suppleness and harmony), no surprise there! So, with the training scale in mind, we used shoulder fore/counter shoulder fore exercises to help improve his bending and suppleness, encouraging a more even connection to the bit, while keeping the energy level up - so we could go for the half pass and extended trots for a ‘9’!

As for canter work, I've been able to refine Kai's collection, balance and obedience with the privileged exposure over the years of Mr. Schumacher's 10 meter square. The result being, Kai's pirouettes are basically good and he usually scores 7's and 8's but when Charlotte asked us to demonstrate **her** canter square it was a fun challenge! Her request... 3 strides for the turn, 3 strides forward, 3 turning, 3 ahead, etc.



Mentally, I formulated a plan. Our familiar 10 meter square would be a logical place to start for a successful outcome to the scenario. The methodical approach paid off, as I started with a good quality collected canter and with more concentration and preparation, we decreased the length and number of strides and after a few practice steps - we were successful!

It was a good visual demonstration for the auditors and they showed their knowledge and appreciation of our efforts. Charlotte's approach of focusing on the fine points of a movement, her detailed training approach while strictly adhering to the basics was

obvious to the auditors - and she was pleased!

I quickly learned Charlotte is not one to stop short, though, so she took us another step further - actually several steps further but that's another story! Now asking us to make the pirouette square with just one stride forward between the 3 turning steps, she cautioned me to keep him straight by maintaining shoulder fore on the one forward step!

Keep the connection, the balance, the bend, the suppleness, the activity and jump of the stride, and the straightness while remaining nearly on the spot - no wonder this is a challenging sport! Again taking the time to establish a good collected canter, I asked Kai for a few really collected steps, in and out of our 'pirouette canter' for preparation and after a few attempts at coordinating the forward/turning aids - it became possible! Charlotte's exercises for perfecting the pirouettes were definitely a highlight of the day's instruction.

Giving us time to prepare for a movement, execute it, and then reward with a stretch or walk break, I found her help and guidance a very valuable experience. She confidently led the clinic, all while insisting the rider not compromise the basics for the sake of 'a movement'. The horse must remain supple, on the bit, and active. These basics are critical and if they are temporarily misplaced - she insisted they be reestablished before continuing!

Charlotte incorporated her extensive experience while following the outlines defined in the pyramid - the Training Scale is a logical way to prioritize the qualities we want to achieve in dressage. Her focused teaching, made it clear how to achieve a higher degree of success. The many wonderful auditors who braved the elements left with many notes and some great ideas to use at home. Use the Training Scale to guide your riding and you will stay 'straighter' during your journey!

Thank you Fresno CDS for your support in helping make this experience a possibility! Renee