Transitions

The Thrill of a Lifetime

Hoping for a lesson on a nice horse, a surprised student lands herself a memorable session on a world-class retiree.

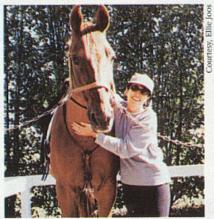
By Ellie Joos

fter my son had finished with college and I had taken care of the last of the expenses, I happened upon dressage purely by accident. Under the guidance of a dedicated trainer, Cindy Canace, I have grown to love the sport. I've even had a few experiences that I feel are worth sharing.

Being somewhat uneducated about the horse market, I started my dressage career

with a Quarter Horse. He and I parted company after he realized that I was afraid of him. Then my sweetheart, Applelonia, a 14.3-hand Morgan Horse, entered my life and together we began our education. Of course, it was one of the worst combinations-green horse, green rider-but we have persevered and are making great

progress. At this point in my life, my goal is to have fun and perhaps make it to First or Second Level. I have become familiar with the names of the "heroes" in the dressage world through magazines, videotapes and Camp Happy Rock, the adult



While on a business trip, Ellie Joos took a memorable dressage lesson on Monsieur.

dressage camp that Cindy organized. In my capacity as a Camp Happy Rock volunteer, I have rubbed elbows with Betsy Steiner, Kathy Connelly and Kathy Adams, the camp's great teachers.

My business requires me to travel to California, and last year I discovered that Olympic bronze medalist Charlotte

Bredahl-Baker lives in one of the neighborhoods I frequent. On a whim, I called to see if I could schedule a lesson with her. I expected a return call from an assistant and was pleased when Charlotte herself phoned to arrange for the lesson.

She was wonderful. My lesson was on a First Level horse on the longe, and Charlotte did not make me feel foolish. In fact, she was very encouraging. On my most recent trip, I called again and was able to arrange another lesson. When I arrived at Charlotte's beautiful new facility, she was riding her Grand Prix partner Lugano. She pointed to a horse in a paddock and said to get him groomed and saddled. I walked over to this enormous horse and I thought that he must be kind because Charlotte would not have me ride him otherwise.

As I groomed him, I asked a helper if this was a nice horse, and he said yes. Because of a language difference, I knew that when I asked the horse's name, the man could not possibly have replied, "Monsieur." Of course, I knew all about Monsieur and had recently read in *Dressage Today* that he was retiring after a

successful career with Charlotte.

When I entered the arena, Charlotte was taking Lugano out, and she said to warm up the horse I was riding. Another rider was leaving, and I asked her if my horse was nice, still feeling nervous with this giant creature. The woman assured me that my horse was great. I asked his name, and she replied, "Moose."

"Moose?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied nonchalantly. "It's short for Monsieur."

"Not the Monsieur?" I asked, somewhat dumbfounded.

"Yes, Charlotte's Olympic horse," the woman replied.

I still get goose bumps when I think about it. Charlotte came into the arena, and I expressed my surprise at her choice of horse for me. She grinned and said, "I was going to tell you later. I wanted to surprise you." The next 45 minutes were pure exhilaration. After warming up with walk-trot transitions, we cantered, then cantered from the walk, something I do not yet do with my horse. In fact, the rest of the lesson was spent doing things I have not yet done, and did not think I would ever do.

Under Charlotte's direction and the wonderful Monsieur's magic, we passaged, did flying changes and collected canter. Charlotte said, "I bet you didn't think you'd do passage today." I replied, "I never thought I'd do it in my lifetime!" I laughed out of pure joy, and I sensed that Charlotte enjoyed the same thrill that I was experiencing.

I cannot thank her enough for the gift she gave me that day in allowing me to ride her magnificent horse. As long as I live, I will remember her gracious generosity in giving me one of the greatest thrills of my life.