

Many thanks to the Connecticut Dressage Association and Sperry View Farm for hosting the USDF Instructor/Trainer Development Program Teaching Seminar. This was the third seminar in a series of three that were run in 2024 by the CDA with the support of The Dressage Foundation.

With the continued support of the organizers, volunteers, demo horses, and demo riders the two-day seminar allowed an incredible amount of information to be shared. The discussions that evolved showed so much enthusiasm for the craft of teaching.

The seminar focused on a systematic way for teachers to navigate a riding lesson keeping these things in mind:

- Establishing a rapport with the student.
- Promoting safety of rider and welfare of the horse.
- Developing techniques for assessing a horse and rider combination relative to the Pyramid of Training.
- Creating a lesson plan that allows for the sharing of the what, why, and how of dressage training.
- Using and clarifying the vocabulary used in USDF glossary of terms and the Pyramid of Training in the lesson.
- Designing a program that shares the purpose of the movements and exercises that allows for the development of a horse and rider combination.

On Day 1, USDF Seminar Leaders Sarah Geikie and Bill McMullin guided the auditors through a clear USDF power point program. Some great discussion evolved around topics such as:

-How to use the many resources available to expand awareness of teaching techniques and learning styles in order to share knowledge and skills that align with Dressage Tests and Judges in the U.S.

-The qualities of a Dressage Instructor such as: Patient, Responsible, knowledgeable, respectful, and ability to share enthusiasm for learning.

Day 1 also included demonstration lessons taught by both leaders. These sessions allowed the riders, auditors and participants to become acquainted with a lesson structure that can be used as a guideline for a productive dressage lesson. Questions, answers, and discussions on many topics followed. Experiencing an environment that fosters the sharing of knowledge and information was so exciting!

The program on Day 2 scheduled each participant instructor with a demo horse and rider. One leader evaluated and guided the participant through the stages of a dressage lesson, while the other leader spent time with the other participants watching the lesson and sharing thoughts and suggestions with them.

The lessons on Day 2 ranged from Training Level to Fourth Level which allowed for a large variety of dressage exercises to be shared, explained, and implemented throughout the day. It was fascinating to learn new techniques, images, and concepts that help a student understand the timing and feel for the transitions, patterns, and dressage movements being presented by the seminar leaders and participating instructors.

The participants always kept the safety of the rider and the welfare of the horse in mind. Great conversations ensued about the prerequisites for a successful lesson. Before dressage concepts can be understood and implemented by a horse and rider there is a lot of ground to cover.

A passion for all things to do with teaching filled the indoor. Experience and knowledge were shared in so many categories such as: human and

equine physical therapy, first aid, veterinary care, farrier care, bit and bridle fitting, saddle fitting, rider biomechanics.

As the day progressed, the USDF routine outlined for a dressage lesson became more and more clear to the participants. Every moment of each lesson provided an educational opportunity.

It was invigorating to listen to instructors with different backgrounds and levels of experience share their perspectives and ideas about what they chose to teach, why they chose to teach it, and how they planned to teach it.

Working with humans and horses has so many parameters to consider. It's an exercise in itself to develop the skills to evaluate a horse and rider combination from the many perspectives needed to create an appropriate lesson plan. Then it's another puzzle to relay an understanding of classical dressage training and vocabulary to a student in a way that they can understand it and look forward to using it in future rides. The participants seemed motivated by the challenge.

The development seminar format allowed the participants to work side by side with others who are passionate about the process of assisting riders and horses to grow and work well together.

Sharing and networking with others allows for the conversations about teaching to continue beyond the seminar setting. This is the gift that keeps on giving!!!