

DRESSAGE TODAY

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EXTRA



2023
USDF
Trainers
Conference
Tips

TRANSITION
YOUR HORSE'S
COAT FOR FALL

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◀ Kristin Stein rides Elbrasco – L under the watchful eye of Henk van Bergen.

Tips from USDF Trainers Conference

Learn from internationally respected members of the FEI Judge Supervisory Panel

**ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY
STEPHANIE J. RUFF**

“Dressage is the systematic development of the natural abilities of the horse,” stated Henk van Bergen during the first ride of the Adequan®/U.S. Dressage Federation FEI-Level Trainers Conference. After a two-year absence due to the pandemic, more than 300 enthusiastic individuals descended upon Mary Anne McPhail’s High Meadow Farm in Loxahatchee, Florida, in January to gain wisdom and perspective from van Bergen, David Hunt, Linda Zang and Lilo Fore. They were not disappointed.

The rider and horse combinations were all upper level as the intended purpose of the two-day conference was designed to educate FEI-level trainers and instructors in the classical system of dressage. Throughout the two days, the experts offered numerous training exercises and tips that, while advanced for those in attendance, will offer insights for other levels.

▶▶ TIP

The rider needs to teach the horse where he wants him to go and then show the horse how he should go.

Relaxing a Nervous Horse

Endel Ots rode the talented stallion



▲ Endel Ots rides King's Pleasure, owned by Heidi Humphries, in a leg-yield to help the horse relax.

Meet the Experts

Four members of the FEI Judge Supervisory Panel (JSP) provided instruction and insight at the Adequan®/USDF Trainers Conference. They were:

Lilo Fore – Retired FEI 5* Dressage and Young Horse Judge and 3* PARA Judge, member of Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame

David Hunt – Chair of the JSP, president of the International Dressage Trainers Club and President of British Dressage

Henk van Bergen – Dutch Master Trainer, coach of multiple Olympic dressage teams

Linda Zang – Retired FEI 5* Dressage Judge, member of Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame and recipient of the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement

King's Pleasure who was nervous in the crowded environment. Hunt emphasized keeping the trot slower than what the horse wanted to do to help him relax. He explained that the rider first needs to teach the horse where he wants him to go, and then secondly, he needs to show the horse how he should go. In this instance, the horse should not be the one to control the pace. The rider should. But at the same time, the horse needs



▲ Jan Lamontagne and her own Dutch Warmblood gelding, Kentucky, listen to Lilo Fore while van Bergen watches.

to allow the rider to take him around the arena without it being a big deal.

Hunt then recommended moving a nervous horse sideways because it gives him a job to do and helps expel excess energy. For example, when changing direction across the diagonal, instead of just trotting the diagonal line, leg-yield across the diagonal being sure to keep the horse's body parallel to the long side

▶▶ TIP

It is important that all the movements be done in the same rhythm.



▲ Chris Hickey focuses on keeping the same canter rhythm on Valentin, owned by Cecelia Stewart, through a turn as well as before and after a flying change.



▲ Lehua Custer and F. J. Ramzes demonstrate canter half-pass for attendees and van Bergen.

▶▶▶ **TIP**

When the walk is tense, calm it down a little bit in your mind.

of the arena. “If a horse is crossing his legs, he can’t run away from you,” Hunt said. However, while the leg-yield might slow down the horse, it is important to keep the same tempo when trotting straight ahead and not let the horse get quick again.

Six-Loop Serpentine

Chris Hickey and Valentin also rode with Hunt the first day. In the canter work, Hunt had Hickey do a challenging exercise of a six-loop serpentine in canter with a flying change each time he crossed over centerline. Hunt stated that “it’s all about the turn,” which must be balanced so the horse can straighten before centerline for a clean change.

Keeping the same canter throughout the exercise is also vital. The horse should not get stronger before or after the change, but Hunt admitted it’s a fine line to keep the horse in front of the leg without him getting too strong and, likewise, containing the horse without holding too much. A common mistake riders make is they are so relieved their horses did the change that they let them go after the change, and they get quick. “The easier the canter is, the easier the change will be,” Hunt said.

Building Suppleness and Responsiveness

On the second day, van Bergen worked with Cindi Wylie and the PRE stallion Amado XXXV. Instead of asking her to ride shoulder-in down the entire long side, which van Bergen doesn’t like because it goes on for too long, he had Wylie track



▶ Linda Zang shares her wisdom with attendees, including rider Cindi Wylie and her the PRE stallion Amado XXXV.



▲ After a two-year absence because of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 300 auditors traveled to Florida in January, ready to learn from the presenters, riders and horses at the two-day Adequan®/USDF FEI-Level Trainers Conference.

left and do the movement out of the corner and then head onto a short diagonal line toward B or E. At centerline, she immediately rode a 10-meter half-circle to the right and rode shoulder-in to the right once they returned to the long side in the opposite direction. Then they could do the same exercise to the right on the next long side.

Done correctly, this exercise shows that the shoulder-in is

true and that the horse isn't falling over the outside shoulder. It is important that all the movements be done in the same rhythm. It also needs both horse and rider to think, requires rider control over the horse's shoulders and doesn't allow the horse to take over.

Focus on a Single Flying Change

When the horse anticipates the flying change, doing one or a line of changes, can be challenging on the long diagonal. To help make the horse wait, van Bergen asked Wylie to canter to the left. They rode a short diagonal and did a single flying change. Then at the letter B, she turned onto the opposite short diagonal on the right lead, rode collected canter to make the horse wait and then asked for another single change and cantered on the left lead around the short side.

Walk-Canter Transition

During breaks between riders, Lilo Fore and Linda Zang answered questions submitted from the auditors for help on more training issues. Fore addressed the question, "How do you work on a sharp canter transition from the walk when the horse gets tense in the walk?"

Fore explained that the solution involves the rider's leg aids. "Most of the time, when I see this particular question,



▲ Mary Anne McPhail's High Meadow Farm in Loxahatchee, Florida, was once again the location for the Adequan®/USDF FEI-Level Trainers Conference.

it's because ... the horse doesn't allow the rider to put the leg on to begin with," Fore told the audience "So, the legs are not there at all in a little bit of a tense walk. And now you put your leg on, and the horse takes off like a bullet. The horse should be able to learn and become competent enough, and the rider should become competent enough, to use a little light leg, feel the body a little bit of your horse. Then when you give your aid, it does not come out as a sudden surprise.

"Use certain exercises where you're able to use your right leg, your left leg, both legs, and then you train the response to your transition," Fore continued. "Then he's not going to go from a nothing leg to an all of a sudden leg, which then of course makes him tense and abrupt and runs off."

Fore mentioned the horse does not need to be tense to do a walk-canter transition. "Think of working on a prompt response," she said. "Once in a while, let's face it, if the horse doesn't react, you're going to put your leg on and say, 'Excuse me, I did talk to you, and I'd like to have a reaction.'

"When the walk is a little bit tense, just calm it down," she continued. "But then do still train your horse to have a prompt response to a certain aid. If you calm it down a little bit in your mind ... I think your horse will learn eventually not to be tense and not to be upset. Take your time."

Another exercise a rider with a tense horse can try is putting him "on a curved line. You can do it from a little bit of a sideways action and then straight, so the horse allows you to know that your legs are able to be used."

The Purpose of Leg-Yield

Zang expanded on the reason to do leg-yield off both reins and in both directions. "The purpose of the leg-yield is encouraging the [horse's] inside hind leg to move up under its body toward his outside front leg. The leg-yield is a suppling exercise that encourages the development of lateral responsiveness and strength," she said.

"I think when you turn to the right or turn to the left, you want them to be able to pick up their inside shoulder and move to the point of balance, which is the outside shoulder. I say that continually. You must have a point of balance, and that would be the outside rein, the horse's outside shoulder, and as it develops, the outside of the rider rides the horse, encouraging him to stay uphill to the outside rein so he can carry himself instead of being low and down on the forehand."

This has been confirmed with highly respected veterinarian, researcher and horsewoman Hilary Clayton, BVMS, PhD, Dipl. ACVSMR, FRCVS, who has explained and shown "us to develop the horse's ability to step under the body with the inside hind to the outside rein, and he opens up the chest and develop the sling muscles." (These are the main muscles between the horse's front legs that support the forehand.) 🐾

How to Transition Your Horse's Coat for the New Season

Q Every fall I wonder how to best manage my horse's coat. I don't want to clip him too early and sometimes wonder if I should clip at all. What is the best practice to keep him comfortable and clean as we transition from summer into fall and winter?

Name withheld by request

CAT HILL

Crisp autumn air has arrived and so has new growth on your horse's coat. Seasonal transitions can pose challenges for your horse, but regular grooming can help. Coats already begin growing out as early as mid-August to prepare for the cooling temperatures. During this time, your horse may become itchy and uncomfortable. You can maintain your horse's comfort and health through the seasons by developing a seasonal grooming routine.

Determine your routine. Currying is always the go-to practice for new seasons. To remove loose hair and debris, vigorously rub circles all over your horse's coat. Use a gentle rubber curry comb, not a metal curry, on shorter transitional coats. For a very woolly horse, try adding a deshedding comb or rake to your routine. Using this tool on the longer areas of the coat can loosen the hair and make horses look more presentable through the season. A rake with closely placed teeth is ideal for dense, compact coats. While your horse's coat will likely determine the type of tools to use, you can also consider the horse's personality. Each horse is different and may have a preference between curry combs and clippers. Try a few different tools to see how your horse responds before finalizing your routine.

Try clipping your horse. Experienced equine groomers can opt to clip the horse if he is not yet shedding or has just started to shed. I recommend clippers that are cordless (for mobility) and have the ability to run for a few hours at a time. I also like clippers that have removable battery packs that can be swapped out during long grooming sessions. You still need to curry a clipped horse, as he will shed the fragments of hair that are left from the previous season's coat.

I like to use a grooming glove since you can get into every nook and cranny. This can also help you detect any health issues or discomfort your horse may be experiencing.

Keep the coat clean and dry. Inclement weather—and the mud that follows—can leave a horse cold and wet. Try to make sure your horse spends a portion of every day in a nice, dry environment. As the weather cools, it's especially important to ensure that moisture does not get trapped in your horse's coat. A fine, short coat in the summer is more conducive to evaporating sweat and regulating your horse's temperature. As the coat grows longer, an active horse will require a regular grooming routine. Currying the coat as it grows out can prevent moisture from getting trapped. Clipping the legs and pasterns down the back also helps keep the skin dry. When trimming, avoid clipping in an upward motion, as that could nick or irritate the horse's skin and invite infection.

Take a closer look. If you notice your horse's coat is dull and has lost its luster or if your horse exhibits signs of discomfort during grooming, check his skin. Scratches, rain rot and other skin conditions can crop up at this time of year. Use your fingers to feel beneath the coat. Check the armpits, chest and face closely for any hidden issues like bumps, scabs or roughness. You can try working a bit of cornstarch-based baby powder through the coat or zinc oxide cream for moderate skin issues. If you discover any major irritations, consult your veterinarian.

By paying close attention to your horse's environment, coat length and luster and any signs of discomfort, you can prevent issues and help your horse enjoy a healthy transition into the new season. ●



Arnd Bronkhorst - arnd.nl

By paying attention to your horse's environment and his coat length and luster, you can prevent skin issues and help him enjoy a healthy transition into the new season.

Cat Hill

grew up in New York riding ponies and later rode show hunters through college. After college, she moved to Ireland and worked at Mullingar Equestrian Center with show jumpers and eventers. She later returned to the U.S. and was a working student for a top Grand Prix dressage rider before being hired to manage eventer Mara DePuy's barn. Today she freelances as a groom for various disciplines and teaches lower-level riders in dressage, jumping and eventing. She and Emma Ford wrote the book, *World-Class Grooming*.