

DRESSAGE TODAY

VOL. 22

# EXTRA

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**Lessons with  
Silva Martin**

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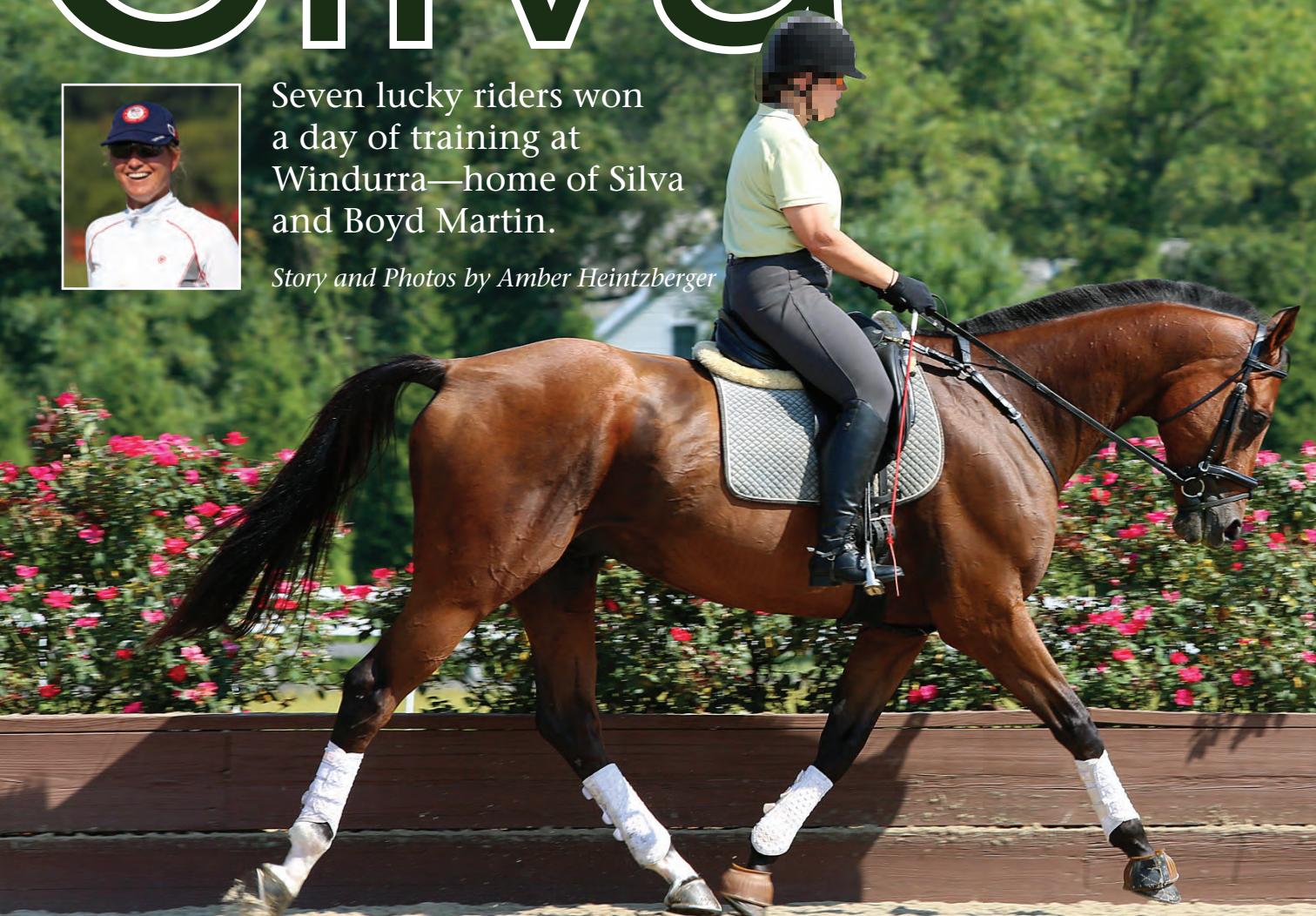
FROM THE DRESSAGE TODAY ARCHIVES

# Lessons with Silva



Seven lucky riders won a day of training at Windurra—home of Silva and Boyd Martin.

*Story and Photos by Amber Heintzberger*



**Daphne Soares and six of her friends, including her son, traveled to Windurra for a day, spending the morning working on dressage with Silva Martin and the afternoon schooling cross country with Boyd Martin. Daphne and her off-the-track Thoroughbred, Anakin, are schooling Preliminary level in eventing.**

**W**ho would you invite to join you if you and 10 of your closest friends had the opportunity to spend a day with Grand Prix dressage rider Silva Martin and her three-day-eventer husband, Boyd? That's a question Daphne Soares, of Long Valley, New Jersey, had the opportunity to answer when she won a contest sponsored by *Dressage Today*, *Practical Horseman* (DT's sister publication) and Purina Horse Feed. The clinic took place at Boyd and Silva's farm, Windurra, in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, in September (2016).

Silva is a Grand Prix dressage rider who represented the United States on the gold-medal-winning team at the 2014 Nations Cup in Wellington, Florida, and Boyd is a member of the U.S. Eventing Team and competed in the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Daphne and six of her friends traveled to Windurra for the day, spending the morning working on dressage with Silva and the afternoon schooling cross country with Boyd. (You can read about the cross-country portion of the clinic at [PracticalHorsemanMag.com](http://PracticalHorsemanMag.com). Search Boyd Martin, Daphne Soares.) Over lunch Boyd told stories about his Olympic experience and then gave everyone a tour of the eventing barns to meet some of his world-class event horses, including Blackfoot Mystery, Welcome Shadow, Crackerjack, Shamwari, Remington XXV and Neville Bardos.

Daphne, a professor of evolutionary neurobiology at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, attended the clinic with her off-the-track-Thoroughbred gelding, Anakin, whom she bought as a 2-year-old. Together, the pair competes at the Preliminary level in eventing. Daphne's son, Tzur Haspel-Soares, who also attended the clinic, competes at Novice



**During the dressage session with Daphne, Silva encouraged Daphne, who tended to lean a little too forward, to stay behind Anakin's movement with her upper body. Silva also encouraged Daphne to move Anakin's shoulder's in. "You want less bend, a steady rhythm and the shoulders in," she said.**

level with his pony, Lovee.

During her time with these riders, Silva focused on the basics. She began each session by letting the riders go through their typical warm-up routine, first riding the horses forward around

the outside of the ring, then adding some circles and bending exercises at the walk, trot and canter. Then she asked the riders to begin supplying their horses before practicing their respective dressage tests.

## Session 2 Riders

**Jen Garutti**, of Flemington, New Jersey, is an IT project manager for a financial services firm, Pony Club DC, an active event rider, wife and mother of two. She grew up in New England active in Pony Club and has evented through Preliminary level. She took an 11-year hiatus from riding while her kids were little and got back into eventing in 2015. Her Connemara/Quarter Horse pony mare, Labras Leannon, was the highest-placed pony at the 2016 American Eventing Championships (AEC).

**Rumsey Keefe**, of Sandy Spring, Maryland, is a stay-at-home mom with an eye-catching off-the-track Thoroughbred, Eighttofasttocatch, who won just over \$1 million as a racehorse racing from age 2 to 9, including winning the Maryland Million Classic three years in a row. They placed second in Beginner Novice at the AEC, and she planned to move him up to Training level this fall, then Preliminary next year. Eventually her daughter, Ryan, will start competing him.

**Deena Cahill**, who leases her horse, is competing at Beginner Novice and recently moved up to Novice. They are schooling First and Second Level dressage. They placed 10th at the AEC in the Beginner Novice division.



**Daphne's son, Tzur, competes at Novice level in eventing with his pony, Lovee, and really wants to ride a musical freestyle. Silva said that getting Lovee more forward and supple will help Tzur score extra points with the attractive little mare.**

### Session 1: Tzur and Lovee

Tzur is working on the U.S. Equestrian Federation Training Level dressage tests, and he really wants to ride a musical freestyle. His pony, Lovee, is a willing partner, but Silva said that getting her more forward and supple will help Tzur score extra points with the attractive little mare.

Silva had Tzur work on holding the inside bend, pushing with his inside leg and leg yielding to the outside of the arena to push Lovee into the outside rein. She also had him work on keeping the bend through his turns and using lots of changes of direction to supple Lovee.

Silva believes that Tzur has an excellent position but needs to remember to sit tall in the saddle to make his seat more effective. This also will help him present a more polished picture. "Sit down, push your seat into the saddle and keep your heels down," she said, at which point Lovee's ears went back and she lost her forward

energy. "When your mare gets a little nappy, ride her forward again. Push your seat down and open your shoulders," Silva coached.

Tzur hoped to ride Lovee to Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal" for his freestyle, which he practiced after someone cranked up the music from a car stereo so he could give it a run-through. But Silva suggested that he go back to the drawing board and find music that better suits his pony's gaits. "You would think the canter is fast and that you need faster music, but really the canter needs slower music," she explained. "I don't think this song will work for you."

By the end of his lesson, Tzur was sitting tall and proud in the saddle and smiling as he rode. Silva was duly impressed with the progress he made. "He's a very good rider. There wasn't too much to improve on," she said. She went on to say jokingly, "He'd better keep an eye on that pony though or I'll be stealing her for [her son] Nox!"



**FROM LEFT: Rumsey Keefe, Jen Garutti and Deena Cahill rode together in a session with Silva. The group warmed up with a walk, trot and canter in both directions. During this time, Silva asked the riders to focus on riding the horses forward and straight.**

## **Session 2: Jen Garutti, Rumsey Keefe and Deena Cahill**

First Silva asked the group to warm up as usual and watched the horses and riders walk, trot and canter in both directions. She told each rider to go forward and straight, not sideways, in the beginning, emphasizing that the horses needed to push under with their hind end and that the riders shouldn't let the horses' hindquarters trail behind. During the warm-up, Silva suggested that the riders try to touch the saddle pad with their little finger to keep their hands down and steady as the horses were still working in a fairly low outline.

After a warm-up focused on getting the horses forward and warming their muscles, the riders walked a few minutes to give their horses a breather. Then they started trotting circles and serpentines, beginning to supple the horses in both directions.

As the riders began to supple the horses, Silva said, "Bend them to the inside and catch them with the outside aids. Bend the horse around the inside

leg, no drifting to the outside. Open the shoulders, pushing the withers up."

Next, shortening the reins, riders began putting the horses together in a more collected outline. "Keep the hands down and ride forward and up from your seat," said Silva. "When you ride forward, be careful not to push the horse past the steady rhythm. The horse should feel very even and consistent in his stride."

Finally, each rider schooled her dressage test. Rumsey, schooling Training Test B, focused on consistency. "Make sure you have the right trot for the test. Down the centerline we want the same trot the whole way, not five different trots," said Silva. "The judges should only see two legs from the front if the horse is straight. You want to feel as if he's in a tunnel between both reins and won't hit either side of that tunnel. Stay tall and look where you're going."

This test includes 20-meter circles in both directions. "You want your horse to make a round circle around the inside

leg without any drift," said Silva. "You want a steady, even contact with the horse's mouth, no loop or slack in the rein. Think about keeping his shoulders to the inside on the circle."

At the medium walk, she said, "Play with the bit in the transition to keep his mouth soft, gently moving it in his mouth with your fingers to keep him supple without moving his head. You don't want to see-saw the bit back and forth, just keep softening it in his mouth."

And on the stretching circle, she suggested, "Open your shoulders and try not to lean forward with him. Before the diagonal trot, try to get him together, and then push. The beginning of the test was great, then you lost accuracy a bit. Let's practice the walk again."

On the trot diagonal, Rumsey's horse broke to canter. Silva said, "OK, still send him forward. On the short side focus on the push, then on the diagonal allow him forward, which will help you keep your rhythm better."

## A Meaningful Collaboration

Though they compete in separate disciplines, Boyd and Silva Martin are a team in life and work, and they help each other bring the best out in all of the horses at Windurra, regardless of discipline. Cross-training over fences and in the open helps Silva's dressage horses become brave and more athletic, and Silva is able to fine-tune Boyd's event horses' dressage training to give them an edge in eventing competition.

The young dressage horses school in the arena only two or three days each week. Boyd and his assistant riders or Silva's working students might take them out across the fields, through streams and up hills and across uneven terrain at a good strong trot. Another day Boyd will set up basic jumping exercises—just a few small fences or some grid work to keep them thinking and moving their feet and give them a change from the dressage arena. They'll also take the horses out hacking on hard roads to build bone density and to get them used to the sights and sounds off the farm so they are more settled in the busy atmosphere at horse shows.

Silva often schools Boyd's horses as part of their regular training program, and when one of them needs a little "dressage boot camp," she steps it up by schooling the horse herself for a week or two or helps Boyd from the ground. Before a major event she'll dedicate extra time to helping him work through the movements of a test, fine-tuning the horse's training and Boyd's riding, and focusing on accuracy so they don't give any points away. Cross-training not only gives Boyd and Silva's horses a competitive edge, it keeps things fun and interesting for both horses and riders and builds partnerships across disciplines.



**Rumsey planned to move her OTTB, Eighttofastcatch, up to Training level in the fall, then Preliminary. Eventually her daughter, Ryan, will start competing him.**

Jen was riding Training Test B and again Silva encouraged her to play with the bit in the transitions. For the lengthening at the trot she said, "Before the corner take up the reins and then allow your horse to lengthen across the diagonal. Go! Get her a little rounder so she doesn't fall apart halfway through."

Deena trotted boldly down the centerline, but overshot X for her halt. "You can't miss the half halts. You need to ride little half halts to balance him," said Silva. "You also need to slow down for the transition instead of gunning it into the halt. Keep your leg on, but don't go too fast."

Silva elaborated, "Deena likes to ride forward, which is good, but she needs little half halts to get a little suspension/air time in the medium trot, which she can achieve with little half halts every stride. Sitting up taller and closing the hand and leg will help balance the horse and bring him together."

### **Session 3: Daphne Soares, Nancy Seybold and Ryan Keefe**

The format for this session was the same as for the second group with the early warm-up focused on getting the horses forward, then adding circles and serpentines to supple the horses. Nancy's horse is heavyset and has a big, strong neck. He loves to stiffen his topline and carry his neck too high, so Silva had Nancy working on encouraging him to relax through his neck and back. "He's a big horse and so uphill that he gets a little hollow sometimes," Silva said. "Think about dropping the base of the neck. That's the bridge to the back, and you want to keep the back up. As you add in bending lines and circles, keep



**Jen's Connemara/Quarter Horse pony mare, Labras Leanon, was the highest-placed pony at the 2016 American Eventing Championships.**



**Ryan Keefe and her Cleveland Bay mare, Secret, are competing at Training level. Ryan plans to sell Secret to begin riding her mom's OTTB.**

pushing the base of the neck down."

Daphne tends to lean too far forward on her young horse, and Silva encouraged her to stay behind the movement with her upper body. "Keep your leg by the girth, not too far back, and move the horse's shoulders in—if you move the haunches out, he curls around too much. You want less bend, a steady rhythm and the shoulders in."

Silva offered comments as riders warmed up. "Ryan, keep her rounder before the canter to get better transitions. Nancy, keep your hands steady, no loop in the reins."

As in the previous session, the riders went through their tests and Silva critiqued their rides. She suggested that in the free walk, Daphne encourage her horse to take long, slow steps, not just walk faster. To Nancy, she said, "Keep him between the reins and legs, leg on and eyes ahead. In the free walk get that neck as low as possible."

At the end of the sessions, Silva said, "They're all nice horses, and we enjoyed the group of riders. Daphne

chose a great bunch of friends and we had a lot of fun working with them!" As a final suggestion she said, "Another thing that everyone should remember is that accuracy is very important when

you are riding a test. There's no point throwing points away. Most of the time you have control of accuracy while there are plenty of other things that are less in your control." 🐾

## Session 3 Riders

**Daphne Soares** rode her OTTB Anakin. She got him off the track as a 2-year-old, and they are schooling Preliminary level eventing.

**Nancy Seybold**, of Washington, DC, works as an information architect on public health and biomedical/health info websites. She grew up riding hunter/jumpers but has been eventing for more than 10 years, competing through Preliminary level. She hopes to compete again at Preliminary with her current horse, a Percheron/Thoroughbred cross currently going Training level. "I hope to grow old and gray doing dressage and galloping through the woods with my husband," she said.

**Ryan Keefe**, of Sandy Spring, Maryland, is a high school student. Her mare, Secret, a Cleveland Bay, is her first horse after moving up from a pony and the pair is competing at Training level. Ryan has fox-hunted and Pony Clubbed in addition to eventing and plans to sell Secret to begin riding her mom's OTTB.

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# Help Your Horse Recover From Intense Work

*Considerations for training, competition, dietary strategy and supportive therapy*

**Q** What is the best way to help my horse recover after a challenging training session or competition?

**A** There are steps a rider can take both before and after exercise to help his or her horse recover from an intense training session. For example, consistent training in the lead up to competition and the approach to the warm-up will positively influence recovery.

Dietary strategies like choice of feed and supplements can have a big effect on recovery. And supportive therapies can be implemented after training to optimize a horse's recovery.

**Proper Conditioning.** The steps to optimal recovery for a horse actually begin well before the training session itself. For example, make sure that your horse has been properly conditioned for the level at which he is training and competing. Physical training at a level that is about 80 percent of the intensity of the targeted event helps to not only promote fitness in the typical ways we think (muscle strength, ligament and

tendon integrity and cardiovascular tolerance) but it also works on a cellular level to fine-tune the way a horse generates and consumes the very important fuel glucose—what we think of as sugar—that is needed for exercise. By maintaining a consistent training program, your horse will not only perform better in competition, but his recovery will be smoother and there is reduced likelihood of illness or injury.

**Nutrition.** How you feed your horse can influence his ability to successfully train at intense levels. While glucose is typically the primary energy source, muscle tissue can also learn to use other resources such as fat metabolites for energy at maximal intensity. For this to occur, it requires feeding a diet higher in fat and lower in starch. Over time the muscle cells develop pathways to break down the added fat, especially in times of maximal exertion.

Timing of meals, as well as choice of feed prior to exercise, can influence a horse's performance and recovery. Because of complex interrelationships between the muscle cells and hormones such as insulin, a horse will be better able to provide energy to his muscles if he is fed a lower-sugar-content meal more than three hours prior to exercise. On the other hand, large meals prior to exercise cause a shift of fluids within the horse's body that can make it harder to maintain adequate hydration during exercise and create increased weight and possibly interfere with lung expansion. A forage-based meal that is under three pounds fed



Maintaining a consistent training program will help your horse perform better in competition. It also will help his recovery and reduce the likelihood of illness or injury.

two to three hours prior to exercise is a better strategy to provide the necessary energy for training without any negative side effects.

**Supplements.** There are byproducts of intense exercise that accumulate inside the muscles of a hard-working horse. One important category is free radicals, which are naturally generated as muscle breaks down energy for contraction. Excess free radicals create inflammation and cause damage to the muscles. One very effective way to counter excess free radicals is supplementation with antioxidants such as Vitamin E, C and Selenium or phenols like resveratrol and pterostilbene. The compounds resveratrol and pterostilbene are the beneficial ingredients in blueberries and the skin of red grapes that can help cells protect against the damage caused by free radicals. Antioxidants can help restore balance inside muscle tissue.

**Hydration.** A horse experiences significant water and electrolyte losses as a result of strenuous exercise, specifically sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium. This is especially true in hotter and more humid climates. Fresh plain water should always be available before and after exercise. Adding loose salt or electrolyte supplements to the diet prior to transport can help ensure your horse drinks well on the road and arrives to the competition well hydrated. In hotter conditions or after particularly hard exercise when your horse has produced large volumes of sweat, supplementation with

electrolytes after exercise is recommended to help your horse replenish those that were lost. There are also supplements that contain branched-chain amino acids, the building blocks of protein that can be readily absorbed by muscle to immediately replenish its energy stores. These can be fed directly in a paste or powder formula to provide essential nutrition to depleted muscle tissue without the work of digesting a meal.

**Warm-up.** Recovery after exercise is also heavily influenced by the warm-up before intense exercise. An optimal warm-up gradually conditions the muscles, joints and soft tissues. Steadily increasing intensity in a warm-up can slowly stimulate the heart and lungs to prepare for the pending high demand. This slow rise in blood flow to the large muscle groups maintains higher delivery of oxygen throughout the horse's body during peak training exercises to reduce build-up of byproducts such as lactic acid or excessive heat.

**Cool Out.** A proper cool out after training is very important, especially during the hotter summer months. Keeping your horse's coat clipped during competition season can help to maximize cooling. Learn to measure parameters such as heart rate, respiratory rate and rectal temperature. This step should be put into practice at home both before and after exercise. This will familiarize your horse with the process and help you develop a sense of what is normal for your horse. Slow, steady walking until

the horse's respiratory rate and body temperature has come down to normal helps maintain the necessary blood flow to the larger hindquarter and topline musculature to dissipate the accumulated break down of products from sustained muscular contraction. Monitor breathing and temperature for up to 10 minutes after exercise. Aim to walk your horse until his rectal temperature has reduced at least 2 degrees from what it was at the completion of the ride. When your horse's breathing has properly recovered, he will no longer flare his nostrils and will not use his belly to breathe.

**Additional Care and Therapy.** Rapid cooling with buckets of chilled water is essential for the overheated horse. Contrary to popular belief, it's not necessary to scrape the water off. Time is of the essence here and is best spent continuously pouring chilled water over the horse, ideally while he is still walking. As your horse recovers, you will notice the water coming off your horse is no longer hot. Additional cooling measures include access to shade and misting fans, if available. Ice and cold therapy are very effective at reducing inflammation in joints and soft tissues after strenuous activity and are commonly used to promote recovery. There are myriad choices of ice boots for purchase—some even offer compression—but homemade options can be equally effective. 🐾

*This column has not been approved or endorsed by U.S. Equestrian.*



CRICKET RUSSILLO

*Christina "Cricket" Russillo, DVM, graduated from the Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in 2001. After completing a large animal medicine and surgery internship at Texas A&M, she realized her desire was to work on elite sportshorses. Following 13 years of practice at Fairfield Equine Associates in Newtown, Connecticut, focused on high-level show-jumping and dressage horses, she joined Virginia Equine Imaging in 2015. Russillo relocates to Florida every winter to support her clients and patients. She has competed through Third Level in dressage and in February 2017 she was appointed the U.S. Dressage Team veterinarian. She is also a certified member of the International Society of Equine Locomotor Pathology.*

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