

Begin the Dance Private Coaching Session

Rider's Name: Jane

Horse's Name: Beauty

Video Link: www.youtube.com

Date of Session: 2/1/16

Overall Impression

I think that you and your horse make a great pair! His size fits you perfectly and it seems like your personalities mesh well. In my experience Friesians are not an easy breed to train for dressage but they have tremendous heart and personality. Luckily, your Friesian has good conformation and three solid gaits. He looks strong in the hind end and appears to have upper level potential. It looks like your saddle fits you and your horse fairly well. I would like to see you loosen the flash noseband or ride without it. I feel that it hides issues that are going on with the horse, and that tension will manifest somewhere else in the horse's body. Your Friesian is in great condition with good muscling and a shiny coat. His under-neck muscles are slightly over developed but that can be changed over time with more stretching exercises. Overall, I would like to see him reach over his topline and maintain better self-carriage. That is what I would like to help you with during our sessions. You are doing an excellent job in your training, the changes that need to be made are fairly minor but will help you reach the next level of balance and harmony.

Working Walk Pirouettes (Start of Video- 1:20)

Your video starts with working walk pirouettes to the left. The view from behind is excellent to check where you are sitting during this movement. As you ride the walk pirouette your weight is sliding to the outside of your saddle (to the right). For your horse to maintain a supple bend and balance you need to sit TOWARDS your horse's bend. This applies to all lateral movements, not just the walk pirouette. It is a common mistake for riders to fall to the outside of a pirouette and the halfpass. It is even seen at the Grand Prix level so please don't feel like you are alone in this struggle. Sitting to the outside helps the rider have more leverage with the outside leg but will cause stiffness in the bend as the horse braces his neck. The saddle will press uncomfortably against the horse as he bends left but the saddle is going right. **Pause your video at 0:51 seconds to see how your hips and shoulders are out of alignment.** When the saddle

slides to the outside it will also block the horse's inside hind leg from stepping under his body as seen at 1:17 seconds. This is a common problem in the competition arena and one misstep can take an "8" walk pirouette down to a "4" instantly. Please include a few walk pirouettes in your next coaching video, keeping the camera behind you so that I can see the alignment changes.

Reminders for the walk pirouette:

- Always sit slightly to the inside of your saddle TOWARDS your horse's bend.
- The horse follows your weight, think of LEADING him into the walk pirouette you're your weight and energy, as opposed to leaning away and pushing.
- Sitting to the outside of the saddle tilts your hips, making the inside of your body contract and tighten.
- Having your dressage whip in your left hand will help activate the inner hind leg to keep him from losing the walk rhythm.
- Begin the walk pirouette by asking the haunches to come in but only enough to feel as though the horse will not step out. Immediately shift your focus to the horse's shoulders, bringing them around the haunches by looking in the direction you are going and taking both hands the same way. Most riders overuse their outside rein which blocks the shoulders in the walk pirouettes. The same concept is true for halfpass.

Working Walk (1:20-3:09)

Before you picked up the left lead canter please notice how your horse's neck is quite short and he is wandering in the hind legs. This shows that the horse is not completely connected through his topline and the energy is getting stuck in his back. Horses will mirror our bodies and I am seeing that you also hold tension and tightness in your middle back and shoulders. It looks like you are trying to accomplish connection by pushing the horse to a restricted contact rather than allowing the energy to flow from the hind to the front, letting the neck reach out. Focus on your hands and seat following the motion of the walk. Emphasize it in your training sessions to stay loose and aware. As riders we tend to get very still and sometimes stop our seats as we think of something else, like a canter transition. The moment our seat stops "walking" the

horse will restrict his movement to mirror you. This can cause resistance and bracing because the energy is being blocked by the seat.

Exercise to try:

- Yoga and basic stretches are an excellent way to relax your back and shoulders. Try some light stretching 10-15 minutes before you get on your horse.
- In your riding warm-up incorporate some large arm circles to help open the front of your body, relax your shoulders, and bring positive energy to your core.

Working Canter Left Lead (3:10-5:04)

Your Friesian has a lovely canter but it looks like you are working too hard to keep him “round”. Your hands are quite busy and the horse is higher in his frame than he can carry in the hind legs. This reveals weakness in the hind end (very common with the Friesian breed—I know from experience!) and that you have relied on your hands to keep him “together” rather than the horse developing self-carriage. Notice when you canter through the short side around 4:06 seconds that your horse is tilting his nose to the outside in a steady rhythm. This is because your outside rein half-halts are a little too strong and pulling the nose to the outside in a “see-saw” motion.

Exercise to try:

- Every 3-5 strides practice pushing BOTH hands forward a few inches to see what happens. The ideal reaction would be that your horse stretches his neck a little lower without changing his canter tempo. If he comes above the bit or leans into your hands this means you have been “holding” him up too much. Please show me this exercise at the walk, trot, and canter in your next coaching video.

In your canter-walk-canter transition at 4:37 you showed a very clear transition with no trot steps. Your horse sat well into the transition with the hind legs but overall was behind-the-vertical in his frame. He looked very stiff at the walk and you tried to supple him with flexions. Before, during, and after the transition I did not see a moment of “release” where you gave your hands forward to allow the neck to reach. Sometimes just the simple act of letting go will do the trick. Relax your arms, relax your fists, relax your fingers. I am feeling the tension in your

upper body and I am sure the horse feels it too. You are in great shape with a really good position and deep seat.

Exercise to try:

- I would use frequent free walk breaks with this particular horse if you can. Because his neck is naturally high and short you will need to do everything you can to help him think “reach” and “lengthen”. Using mini free walk breaks in between transitions will help him release and relax his neck into the downward transition. Please include some canter to working walk to free walk in your next coaching video.

Working Canter Right Lead (5:05-7:10)

There is definitely a clear difference between your horse’s left lead and his right lead. The bend looks more flexible on the right side and you look more comfortable. Your timing looks better to the right and you tend to weight your inside stirrup more in this direction. Your horse maintains a steady tempo and carries weight better on the hind end.

Question: Have you ridden counter canter in the past? Have you tried any counter canter exercises with this horse?

I feel that the next step for your horse’s training is developing the counter canter. Your indoor arena has plenty of space to play with serpentine loops and asking your horse to pick up the outside lead.

Exercises to try:

- Ride a three loop trot serpentine keeping your horse bent in one direction. This is a great way to practice what it feels like to steer your horse in counter canter. Once this feels easy try it in the canter. Please include this exercise in your next coaching video.
- I would practice counter canter on your horse’s strong lead first. Try walking on the quarterline tracking to the left. At the beginning of the long side shift your weight to the right, bend your horse and ask for the right lead canter. Keep the counter canter on the long side and transition back to the walk before the corner. Please include this exercise in your next coaching video

Questions to Answer in your next Coaching Session:

- When your horse leans into your hands what is your first reaction? What are you trying to accomplish with these aids? What are your thoughts in that moment? Where do you feel the tension in your body?
- Have you had your horse worked on by a chiropractor? Masseuse? What were the problem areas?
- What is your normal warm-up routine? Do you practice stretching at the trot? Does your horse show more energy at the beginning of your ride and then fatigues or does he tend to get better as the ride progresses?

Recommended Reading

- “My Top Seven Training Struggles with my Friesian” in Friesian Magazine written by Sandra Beaulieu <http://beginthedance.com/wordpress/friesianmagazine>
- “Get your dressage horse to stretch down into the contact” in Dressage Today written by Jerry Schwartz <http://dressagetoday.com/article/eqstretch3099>

Recommended Videos

- Turn-on-the-Haunches and Canter Transitions with Sue Jaccoma. <https://youtu.be/L5irPZjxO3U>
- Stretching at the Trot and Flying Changes with Nicholas Fyffe. <https://youtu.be/zk1Yy16LQpA>
- Walk Pirouettes with Daniel Timson. <https://youtu.be/IH6WcvkaTL8>

Final Thoughts

Thank you for purchasing this coaching session with me. It is my hope to share my knowledge and experiences with as many people as I can. I want to inspire others to follow their dreams and truly dance with their horse.

Keep in mind that everything changes, every day is different, and the problems you have today will probably be different tomorrow.

Email me at beginthedance@gmail.com with questions you have in regards to this session.

If you would like to go more in-depth on these training topics, discuss non-related subjects, and do some problem solving sign-up for a Phone Coaching Session. This includes a thirty minute phone call to discuss the topic of your choice. Everyone learns in different ways. Sometimes talking to a person on the phone helps to process the information better than reading it. It is a great way to dive deep into a training struggle, figure out the root of the problem whether it is physical, emotional, or environmental and ways to solve it.

I hope you learned a lot from this coaching session! I would love your feedback. How did the exercises help you and your horse? Did you have a breakthrough? Was the material presented in a clear, helpful way? Thank you for your help! It is my goal to make these coaching sessions as helpful and inspiring as possible.

Sincerely,

Sandra Beaulieu

“Begin the Dance”

*Let all thought leave your mind
feel your horse in rhythm's time
let your horse's spirit flow
the dance begins when you let go.*

- B.R.

Contact Information

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