

FLYING CHANGES

magazine for northwest sporthorse enthusiasts



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USDF Region 6 & NWDC Championships
Dressage Highlights

Northwest Autumn Classic
Hunter/Jumper Extravaganza

2010 Swedish Warmblood Inspection
High Scores to Northwest Breeders

Clinic With Shannon Peters
'Horse First' Approach



Shannon Peters' Horse First Approach

Training Approach Strikes a Golden Chord

Traumhof introduced a fortunate group of riders, horses, and spectators to Shannon Peters in a clinic held July 10th and 11th. Fortunately for those who missed it, Shannon returns again on November 13th and 14th, to teach another session, which is open to auditors and offering limited riding spots.

Shannon Peters operates SPeters Dressage together with her husband and USET member Steffen Peters. After operating their own businesses for over 20 years, the pair came together as SPeters Dressage in San Diego, California at Arroyo Del Mar eight years ago. Shannon's showing highlights include multiple USEF and USDF Championships. Shannon currently has two Grand Prix horses: the 10 year-old Westfalen gelding Flor De Selva, by Florestan I, co-owned by Shannon and Laurie Browning; and Odyssey, a 14 year-old Ferro son owned by Akiko Yamazaki.

Shannon says about her mounts, "They both have great potential and extremely different characters, so it will be fun to present them both next year!" Odyssey is more confirmed in the Grand Prix but both have great potential.

Shannon taught seven riders each day, in the July clinic. Each rider left the dressage clinic with new tips, tools, and inspiration. Kevin Fink and Jessica Lyman's Traumhof is a wonderful training facility in Carnation, Washington. Participants were offered on-site concessions, boxed lunches, and excellent seating along the long side of the covered arena.

Each of the clinic's horse and rider combinations have been competing at the upper levels regionally. Shannon's approach had an intuitive quality, thoughtful and customized for each horse and rider. In a very short time, the horses were moving more through their top lines, were more self-carried and genuinely happier in their work. I asked Shannon to explain her approach and style of teaching. "I try to acknowledge each horse and rider as an individual and make a plan to help them understand and achieve their goals."

Shannon's approach quickly had the horses working better for the rider. Courtenay Fraser, a professional from Langley, B.C., enjoyed the suppling exercises which made the horses carry the riders forward better and lighter in the connection. "I really enjoyed how Shannon made me *think* constantly during my lessons. She reminded me to be aware of my timing, my

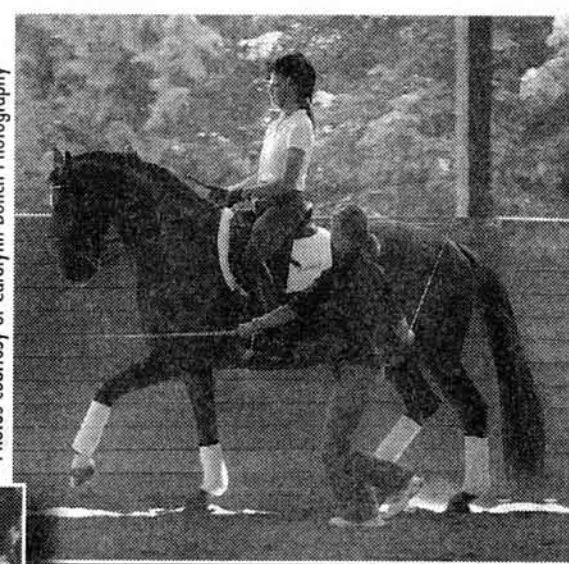
aids and the most effective way to apply them for each desired reaction."

Nicki Grandia stated, "Shannon is very 'horse first' oriented and really focuses on the basics of your position. Everything she did was about getting the horse or the rider to use their body better."

The suppleness and softness—combined with increased trust—was apparent in the lessons. I asked Shannon to explain her term *playful hands*. She answered, "Riders often get 'stuck' in a non-elastic way in the connection between their aids, most often the rein aids, and this creates just as big of a block as a horse can get in the neck, poll and jaw. This can substantially disrupt what

my mentor (Karl Mikolka) terms the "circle of aids" between horse and rider."

"When a horse becomes resistant in the contact, it is the rider's job to determine why this happened. Is the rider balancing on the reins? Where and why did the horse stiffen? What



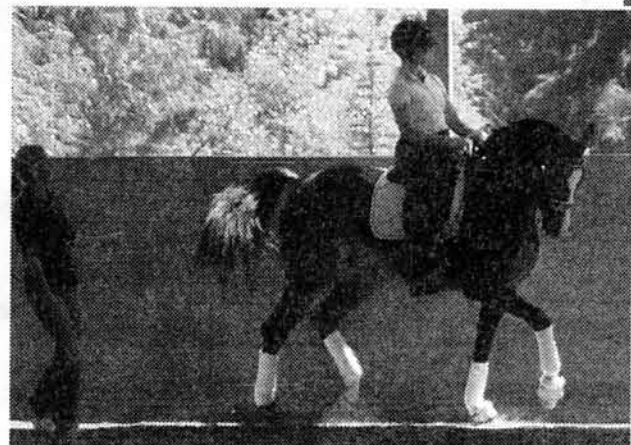
Photos courtesy of Carolyn Bunch Photography

Nicki Grandia & Elisienne

can the rider do to fix it? In general, the elbow should hang in a heavy, soft way at the hip; and lower arm and wrist should be void of any stiffness, softly closing fingers and a *strong thumb*, which keeps the reins from slipping through your fingers. Having flexibility and feeling in the wrist and lower arm can help the rider communicate softly with the horse's mouth to maintain an elastic connection. I also like to tell riders to feel as if their knuckles *push* toward the horse's mouth, with a heavy elbow, as opposed to *pull* backwards towards the waist—this makes a substantial difference in the feeling to the horse!"

"Every positional fault has a negative effect on the horse," she explained. "I try to help riders understand what they can do in their position to communicate more effectively with their horse, as well as explain timing and use of aids and what standard to keep as far as what response you get from the horse."

Shannon offered many different tools and exercises to help achieve results. She attributes this repertoire of techniques to her mentor, Mikolka. She has been fortunate to take part in clinics and training sessions with other trainers, but training with Karl is learning a "system" of training from start to finish. "He has taught me an invaluable amount of information over the years, which has made me be a 'thinking' rider and trainer, not a drill sergeant!"



Courtenay Fraser & Birkegardens Lukas

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Christina Drake

Shannon often worked from the ground with bamboo sticks and a long piaffe whip, to encourage horses to work more from behind, lift their shoulders, and help show a rider stiffness in their shoulders or back area. She is so skillful with these tools, watching her was like appreciating a great orchestra conductor.

Nicki Grandia felt the “sticks” were incredibly helpful and the bamboo worked better than a whip. “It helped Lily figure out how to move her shoulders without me having to push her so much. It really helped create a feeling that I can now strive for.”

Mike Osinski commented, “Shannon was a delight. She was kind, patient and articulate. Her work with Pablo from the ground was wonderful. It was a part of his training already, but she was able to get more out of him, without frying his brain.”

As horses have to be very fit and strong so do the riders. Shannon is very active while she teaches; often running laps alongside a horse with her “sticks”. Her fitness program includes Pilates one day a week, the gym one or two days a week and running two days a week. Additionally, she rides four to six horses a day. She tries not to ride more than that, as she spends a lot of time doing lunging, cavalletti work, in-hand work, trail riding etc. She feels getting to know each horse and their specific needs takes time.

The clinic offered a wealth of information to absorb for auditors as well. Participants, as well as auditors commented on the benefits of auditing clinics. Mike Osinski shared, “It’s

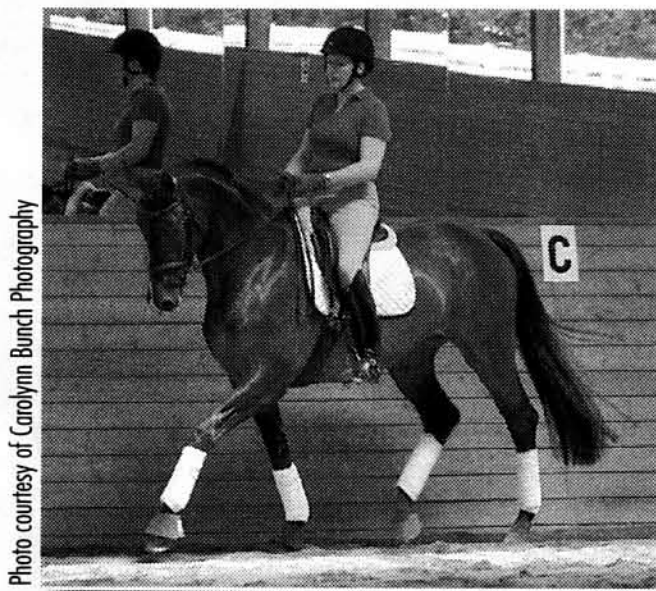
seeing the vision in person. Watching how a great clinician can transform a horse and rider, who may have thought they had the concepts, but then it becomes so much clearer with good eyes from the ground.” He went on to say, “You need to see it in the three dimensional perspective in order to truly grasp the concepts. Reading books and watching videos has their place in education, but watching good horses and riders in person is like having a satisfying meal. It fills you up and leaves you content.”

Shannon is a gracious, generous person and full of gratitude. “Steffen* and I are blessed to have wonderful clients that are a part of our lives every day, and work hard to make learning the art of dressage a fun and rewarding experience for both horse and rider.” She adds, “I am incredibly blessed to ride with, well, one may say I’m biased, but I think the best rider in the whole world—my husband—every single day. He is an inspiration and motivation to be a better rider and trainer every day.”

About the author: Christina Drake has been a Northwest dressage professional for over 20 years. She is a USDF Bronze & Silver Medalist and a “L” Judges Training Graduate with “Distinction”. Currently, she resides in Langley, Washington on Whidbey Island. Her “Bucket List” includes competing at the Grand Prix level, obtain-

ing higher credentials as a dressage judge and to clinic with SPeters Dressage! www.cdrakedressage.com

** (Steffen Peters will teach a clinic at Traumahof in May 2011. Professional riders interested in riding should contact Jessica Lyman for registration requirements.)*



Dusty Thiessen & Brianna

The Riders:

Courtenay Fraser, from Langley, B.C. rode Birkegardens Lukas. Lukas is a 10 year-old Danish Warmblood, by Leender, out of Wanessa. Lukas arrived in North America in early May, so the pair are just getting to know one another. Courtenay hopes to move him into the Grand Prix arena over the next year. Her continued goal is to ride as a member of the Canadian Equestrian Team. This year, Courtenay will continue to train and compete as she operates Highbury Dressage out of Ridge Meadows Farm in Langley, B.C. www.courtenayfraser.com

Dusty Thiessen is a professional rider from B.C. She spent her formative years as a working student with the late Dietrich Von Hopffgarten. She worked up the young rider level and currently trains out of Ridge Meadows Farm, working with students and horses of all levels. Her mare, Brianna is a 9 year-old Swedish Warmblood by Bjorsells Briar, schooling 3rd level. www.courtenayfraser.com

Erin Morris rode her St. Anton, a 10 year-old Finnish Warmblood gelding by Avalon (x Andiamo) out of a Bonsoir mare (x Bolero). Erin imported him from Germany as a five year-old. The pair have just debuted at Prix St George and look forward to a long career. Erin operates Highland Sport Horses out of Traumahof in Carnation, Washington. www.highlandsporthorses.com

Linda Grandia & Eloge II. Elo is a 19 year-old Swedish Warmblood. He has trained and shown in the Northwest all of his life. The pair are currently showing fourth level and hope to move up to Prix St George. Linda Grandia teaches and trains at Hilltop Stables in Woodinville and is the proud mother of three equestrian children, Annie, Mark and Nicki Grandia. www.hilltopstables.net

Maddy McKallip and Donna Carina have been working together for almost five years. Donna Carina is a 14 year-old Hanoverian mare by Donnerhall, bred in Germany. In 2006, the pair were ODS and Region 6 Champions for third level Jr/YR and in 2007 they won ODS championship at fourth level. After time off due to injuries, Donna has made a full recovery and is successfully showing at Intermediaire I, recently winning the Jr/YR High Point Award at the Dressage at DevonWood show. Maddy is studying at UC Davis.

Mike Osinski and Pablo. Pablo is a 13 year-old home bred Oldenburg, just beginning his Grand Prix career. Mike is an ongoing competitor, earning his USDF Bronze Medal in 1985 and USDF Gold Medal in 2002. He spent the spring showing on the California circuit, earning impressive results on numerous mounts. Mike is also an “S” rated dressage judge and trains out of Forest Park Equestrian Center in Lacey, Washington. www.mikeosinski.com

Nicki Grandia & Elisienne. Elisienne is an 11 year-old Stats Premium mare by Donatelli (x Donnerhall), imported from Germany by Traumahof’s Jessica Lyman and Kevin Fink. Nicki has been riding her since October 2009. This spring, the combo competed in the CD13 in Sacramento and at the Del Mar National. The pair also trained with Steffen Peters at Arroyo Del Mar. From 2002 to date, she competed in the NAYRC, in the Brentina Cup, acquired year-end honors at Intermediate II and Grand Prix with Eloge II. Nicki and Lily hope to qualify for the National Championships in Gladstone, NJ. Nicki operates her training business at Traumahof in Carnation, Washington.