

Equestrians Pony Up for Master Tips

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AUGUSTA -- In the eyes of the equine community, Herbert Seiberl is as good as royalty.

"Guitar lessons from Eric Clapton, basketball tips from Michael Jordan, horse-riding techniques from Herbert Seiberl, they're all fair comparisons," said Jorie Sligh, a Holland resident who coordinated this week's clinics led by Seiberl at the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center near Augusta.

The 30-year-old Seiberl is a rider -- technically, he is a Bereiter -- at the elite Spanish Riding School, a world-renowned horse-performing group based in Vienna, Austria. The group is known for the white Lipizzaner stallions on which the 10-member team rides.

Beginning Sunday and concluding Tuesday, Seiberl is providing 10 daily clinics to horse trainers willing to dish out \$175 per one-on-

one, 30-minute session. The cost didn't faze Bloomington, Ind., resident Nancy Kleiner, 52.

"To have a private lesson with someone of Seiberl's status is something you could not find anywhere in the Midwest," said Kleiner, owner of a 16-year-old Hanoverian X Thoroughbred. "And you don't come this far and book just one clinic. I've scheduled training clinics Monday and Tuesday, too."

Kleiner said she hopes the expertise taught to both her and her horse, Dior, will land them the highest-ranking status possible: a Grand Prix designation. Dior's current class is Intermediare 2, one level below Grand Prix.

To put the Grand Prix status in perspective, the stallions on which Seiberl and fellow Bereiters of the Spanish Riding School ride are also at the Grand Prix

level. Kleiner said the ultimate goal of a Grand Prix horse and its rider is to win a gold medal in the annual U.S. Dressage Federation competition, an event overseen by the governing body that regulates contests involving show horses.

To the common man, the clinic appears as nothing more than people riding horses. Sligh, however, notices the steps a horse takes, its body movement and other subtle gestures that show horses working under the guidance of Seiberl are quickly learning.

"The competitions are done to music, and the horses in competition are as graceful as two experienced ballroom dancers," she said.

After his three-day appearance in Augusta, Seiberl will conduct similar clinics in Bridgeport, near Saginaw, before returning to Austria

from his one-week stay in the United States.

Seiberl, who has been with the Spanish Riding School since he was 15, said the clinics are something he enjoys conducting.

“Every rider I want to help and find the best way they can to ride their horse,” he said. “Training is a big part of my life, so this is OK here.”

For a \$25 fee, people can audit the sessions. That means they can “watch and take notes” of the advice Seiberl offers each of the participants. While conducting exercises, Seiberl speaks into a microphone, allowing people to hear the advice, tips and commands he is offering each rider and horse.

A portion of the proceeds raised during Seiberl's instruction this week in Augusta will go toward the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center, a not-for-profit agency that uses horse riding as a form of therapy for children and adults who are handicapped, autistic or emotionally impaired.