

Spanish Riding School Bereiter Herbert Seiberl Inspires & Instructs in Michigan Clinics

By Jorie Sligh, Clinic Organizer

Spanish Riding School Bereiter Herbert Seiberl says during his clinics, "You have time - there is always time, to do something the right way."

Equine enthusiasts from the Midwest were treated to six days of "the right way" and inspirational instruction when Herr Seiberl returned to Michigan in July for two dressage clinics.

Auditors and riders who participated in his first U.S. clinic in Michigan, January, 2007 had been eagerly looking forward to more insight and learning from this gifted instructor, and judging from the clinic evaluations received, he came through in spades.

The two clinics were each three days long and rider skill ranged from Training Level through Grand Prix. Both amateur and professional riders rode in the clinics, working on everything from improving passage to starting one tempis to improving throughness and self-carriage to showing how to ride a green horse straight and forward.

Herbert has sought out more opportunities to speak English in Austria,

and as a result, his English, which was very good when he was here in January, was even better for his summer clinics. This enabled him to articulate very clearly concepts and instruction to the riders.

He is the kind of instructor both riders and auditors can easily learn from because he rides every step with the rider... he is continually commenting on what is good, what the rider can do to improve, and what the horse is doing that is good or needs to change.

One auditor told me that she took more notes from the three days she audited with Herbert than from any other clinic she's audited. I know this woman is a meticulous note-taker and has audited well-known clinicians, so coming from her, that is high praise.

It can be difficult to write a summary of a clinic, as different horses and riders often need different guidance, and also since the instruction can be misinterpreted without seeing the horse and rider and what it is that is being addressed.

There is also limited space in an article such as this,

and it's easy to give an incomplete picture or leave out an important piece of information.

However, some things that Herbert said throughout both clinics can be applied across the board and are basics that can help any horse and rider. A few of those include:

- You must go forward; without forward, you have nothing.
- For downward transitions, prepare two strides, breathe out, and transition. Thus: Half-halt, half-halt, breath, transition.
- Never pull! Vibrate the inside rein and soften, otherwise the horse will learn to lean.

I rode in the second clinic, held at Pamela and Bud Atkinson's Blue Water Stables in Bridgeport, MI (see sidebar).

Pam had generously loaned me her semi-retired Grand Prix Swedish Warmblood/ Lipizzan cross, Brandenburg, to ride in the clinic. I'd ridden him just three times before in lessons, so we were still getting to know one another.

Branden is very smart and sensitive with a great work

ethic, and knows much more than I do! I've been fortunate to have had FEI horses to take lessons on for the past six months, and they're teaching me a lot, but I'm still a lower level rider.

He was the consummate schoolmaster, reminding me right away that I couldn't forget about my outside leg...otherwise, half-passes skitter across the arena (the wrong way!), haunches drift out on turns, etc.

The first lesson included doing a series of walk/trot transitions to encourage Branden to step under himself better and to help keep him light in my hand – good for any level. For trot half-pass, Herbert said, “A little more flexion, more bend as you turn down the centerline. Ride the forehand first, and then the outside leg says ‘sideways’.” Be careful of using too much outside leg - this is a common mistake that causes the haunches to lead.

My brain was scrambled the second day...too little sleep over the past three weeks, plus focusing on the running of the clinic left my perpetually multi-tasking mind unable (apparently) to focus.

Branden basically had his way with me, throwing in ones – on a canter circle, yet! - if I so much as

thought about shifting my weight and moving my leg.

My lack of concentration really revealed itself in the two tempis. Threes were fine, but I couldn't get twos. Just as we finished up (with a diagonal of threes, so that we'd end on a good note), I realized that I'd been counting, which I never do, and that had thrown my timing off. Argh...

The last day (thankfully!) was a lot of fun, as I was determined to focus and try to make up for my scatterbrained riding from the previous day.

Branden was great – much more forward (he needs “GO” more than “WHOA!”), which made everything easier. We did three diagonals of twos on our first attempts - Branden got lots of sugar for those!

Ones were a challenge... first I asked for too much flexion, and Herbert suggested that I not try to change flexion, but to keep his neck straighter, since there wasn't time between changes.

Herbert also explained that I needed to keep my legs against his sides at all times so that he could feel the change in position and understand that I was asking for a lead change.

With those two adjustments, Branden

understood what I was telling him and did ones across two diagonals (more sugar!).

It was fun to work on upper level movements, but throughout the lessons Herbert made sure that the basics were in place, including asking for frequent transitions between and within gaits, lengthenings after collected work, and more activity from behind if we weren't forward enough, among other things.

I've been privileged to watch Herbert teach all or part of over 100 riding lessons, both in Austria and Michigan. Regardless of whether he is teaching in German or English, he has been consistently patient, encouraging, and kind, carefully and systematically guiding his students to help them work through issues and improve their riding and horses' training.

During an interview, a reporter asked Herbert, “What do you get out of teaching these lessons? Does this benefit you?”

Herbert replied without hesitation, “Yes, absolutely this helps me. I learn something from every horse and rider I teach. There is always something new to learn – we never can know everything.”

Herbert said throughout the clinics, “You must show him the way.”

For Herbert, “The Way” is the classical riding that has been the tradition at the Spanish Riding School for 435 years. Progress is not hurried, and harmony between man and stallion is evident in all stages of the training.

Many thanks to Herbert for showing us “the way” and bringing the tradition of the Spanish Riding School to Michigan – we look forward to your return!

For information on future clinics, visit www.dressageclinics.org or contact Jorie at jorie@dressageclinics.org.