

# Herbert Seiberl Heats up the Dressage Arena in January in Michigan

By Jorie Sligh, Clinic Organizer

Outside my home office window, snow was falling. Correction: falling implies motion in a downward direction; this snow was moving horizontally at warp speed. We were in the fourth day of a winter storm... frequent whiteouts, temps in the single digits, 30 mph winds - the kind of winter weather that Michigan is famous for.

I know this, having lived in Michigan for a while when growing up (in the Upper Peninsula, no less, where summer is defined as "three months of bad ice skating") and also as an adult.

*"You must show him the way."*

If someone had told me a year ago that I'd be organizing a dressage clinic in Michigan in January, I would have laughed. There is just no way I'd take that kind of risk! Too many things can go wrong, fairly easily, with a winter clinic in the Snow Belt.

Right? All I had to do was look out the window for confirmation.

## Clinic Winter Wonderland

But there I was, looking out my office window and feeling really grateful that this weather had come a

couple of weeks **after** Spanish Riding School Bereiter Herbert Seiberl's 3 ½ day clinic in Michigan. Yup, in January.

OK, insert a swirly "flashback" special effect here to Fall 2006 when Herr Seiberl asked me to set up some clinics for him over a period of about a week in January.



*Herbert pets Blanca as I answer a call from a lost auditor (forgot to take the phone out of my pocket)*

I knew I should send him South, where snow doesn't regularly shut down airports and highways so that clinicians can't fly in and auditors and riders can't make it to the clinic facility. Where riders can ride and

auditors can audit without worrying about frostbite and frozen toes.

*"That's new for him to learn, and for you, too."*

The thing was - I really, really wanted to ride in a clinic with Herr Seiberl. For me, nothing compares to dressage instruction that is SRS-based and the opportunity to ride with a Spanish Riding School Bereiter was too good to let go.

So I talked with Julie Arkison, who rode her two mares in the July SRS Rostek clinic and could host the clinic at her facility (about 3 hours from where I live). We decided that we could have a Snow Contingency plan and make a clinic work by filling most of the clinic with her boarders and people who lived very close by.

This was Bereiter Seiberl's first clinic in the United States, and he did a terrific job. He was so encouraging - if mistakes were made, he'd say, "No problem!" and then work with the rider through the issue.

He also has a very soothing demeanor that helped horse and rider to relax if they were

nervous or tensing up. His English is very good, and many of the auditor evaluation forms had comments about how easy he was to understand.

He quickly saw that I let my inside shoulder drift forward instead of keeping my shoulders parallel with Blanca's shoulders. To correct this, he had me stretch



SRS Photo  
*Bereiter Seiberl in the Quadrille on Maestoso Virtuosa, 3<sup>rd</sup> from front*

It became very clear to auditors and riders that basics had to be in place before upper level movements could be worked upon. He often said, "You must be moving forward! If you don't have forward, you can not do anything."

I'd had surgery in early December and had ridden Blanca maybe 4 times in the month before the clinic - not the greatest preparation!

My first lesson was a longe lesson to help Blanca relax as well as improve my position, as I'd ridden so little in the past month. Herbert longed me without reins or stirrups, doing leg and arm exercises at the walk, trot, and canter.

my outside hand over and touch the inside of his withers while continuing to sit up straight. This simple exercise helped to correctly align my shoulders, and I still periodically do this to check and correct my position.

### One of those rides...

Thursday's lesson was more along the lines of "Gahhhh!" Blanca the Wonder Lipizzan was not used to being in a stall all day and had an abundance of energy in his almost 23 year-old body.

In addition, he was in one of his über alert "must keep track of EVERYTHING that is going on" moods. The mares, the auditors... He was in ready-to-launch mode the moment I got on him.

That's fine and dandy and even a little fun when we're on our own and when I have time to let him walk around and work enough to relax.

But since I was running the clinic, I didn't have the chance to get on him early and it was hard for him to relax when he was sure that what we really should do were caprioles and levades.

*"It's okay. You have time."*

Herbert was very encouraging, patient and soothing with his instruction, but it was a little exasperating for me to have Blanca so determined to focus on everything around him and trying to ignore me.

After about 15 minutes, Herbert got on him. He was challenging for Herbert, too (read: "Are you SURE you don't want me to levade?"), but Herbert remained patient & firm, and Blanca improved as the lesson continued.



*My reaction to Herbert asking to ride Blanca: "Absolutely!"*

Friday's lesson was much better, and Blanca, as one of two Lipizzans in the clinic,

redeemed the breed & us considerably.

After the lesson and clinic, several auditors told me how majestic and imposing Blanca was, and more importantly, that they could see that there was a strong connection between us.

“He loves you... you can tell he would do anything for you,” one of the auditors said (except, apparently, focus and work when he doesn’t want to, ha!).

Seriously, that made me feel so great. Blanca is a sweet soul and I love him dearly.



Herr Seiberl on Pluto II Samara

Pamela Atkinson, who rode her 13-year-old FEI Lipizzan stallion, Pluto II Samara, in the clinic, said “Herbert showed the riders subtle changes to make to improve their horse’s performance. He demonstrated compassion for both riders and horses at all times and I personally have not seen that level of integrity and

sensitivity in a horseman - ever. He represents the SRS well.”

Pamela has been working on piaffe and passage, but tempis have been a challenge. Herbert rode Sam for one lesson; you could have heard a pin drop. He was so focused on the stallion that he pulled the audience into the focus with him.

The ride consisted of a jillion walk/trot/halt transitions, very accurate circles and figures, and some reinback and half-pass.

Herbert explained that Sam was very talented but needed to transfer more weight to his hindquarters and not be so heavy in the hand. Herbert focused on correcting the basics and

helping Sam to understand that he had to carry himself and not lean on the bit.

Kate Baird, who rode her 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Level TB/Holsteiner cross, was thrilled to have Herbert achieve clean changes with Landgrant, who’d had difficulty with them after being injured.

She said, “Herbert's kind, quiet teaching style was

very helpful to both horse and rider, yet he was not shy about letting the riders know where improvement was needed. He gently insisted on perfection from the rider and compliance from the horse, in a very focused manner.”

*“The posting trot should be like clockwork, always the same rhythm.”*

Auditors, too, raved on the evaluations about Herbert’s instruction and it was wonderful to see so many people interested in the classical teaching of the SRS: 35 – 75 people sat on hay bale bleachers in the cold indoor arena every day to watch and learn.

We lucked out with the weather – throughout the week of the clinic it was unseasonably warm, as temps were in the high 30s and even hit the low 40s, with no snowfall and no bitter cold.

The day after the clinic ended there was an ice storm that frosted the world silver and crystal.

As Julie said, “I don’t have a chandelier in my arena, as they do at the SRS, but right after the clinic the WORLD was my chandelier! Everything sparkled and reflected the gratitude I and my students

had for the experience of learning from Herbert.”

So - would I organize a clinic next January with him? In a heartbeat!

We were definitely lucky to have had the experience of riding with and learning from Herbert, and are looking forward to our next clinic with him – this time, in the heat of summer, when the only ice around will be the ice floating in our glasses of lemonade.

*Bereiter Herbert Seiberl will be teaching clinics July 8 – 10, 2007 at the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center, Augusta, MI (near Battle Creek, MI), and July 12 – 14 at Blue Water Stables, Bridgeport, MI (near Frankenmuth). More information online at [www.dressageclinics.org](http://www.dressageclinics.org) or please contact Jorie: [jorie@dressageclinics.org](mailto:jorie@dressageclinics.org).*



*Conversano Blanca I and me during his really hyped-up, thinks-he's-a-stallion-and-just-can't-relax ride on Thursday*



*Cold bodies, but warm hearts – riders and Herbert after the clinic!*

### **Top Ten Things Heard at a Herbert Seiberl Clinic**

1. No problem...that's no problem!
2. Don't lean forward - sit on your bott!
3. That's new for him to learn, and for you, too. But when you do this the same way every time, he will learn.
4. You must go forward! If you don't have forward, you can't do anything.
5. Ride inside leg to outside rein.
6. Gooooood! That's good!
7. You have time.
8. Vibrate the inside rein!
9. You must show him the way.
10. Pet him!



*Herbert explains a concept to Birgit Villeminey, riding her Morgan gelding, Saumur.*



*Herbert schools tempis on Barbara Duncan's gelding, Lacato*



*Clinic host Julie Arkison, Herbert, clinic organizer Jorie Sligh, and bundled-up auditors!*



*Herbert talks with Pamela Atkinson after riding her Lipizzan Stallion, Pluto II Samara.*



*Auditors listen intently to Herr Seiberl's instruction*