

# A DRESSAGE LESSON WITH CHARLOTTE PEDERSEN



*"It is not always about spurs or the whip, it is about your aids and feeling."*

"One of the problems in Australia for dressage training, is that here people buy a horse and want to have their own arena and stables at home. As a consequence they are riding too much on their own. They come for a lesson every two weeks and then they are on their own again. They go to a competition with no one to help them and there is no one to nag them about bad habits. In Europe people keep their horses at barns where there is a lot of help and good riders to watch every day. Australians are lucky to be able to have the facilities at home, but it is counter productive to improvement. Also instead of staying at home and perfecting the walk, trot and canter, some find that boring perhaps because the lack of stimulation and interaction with other riders and want to

**You must try and get 120% at home before you go out** go to competitions. So many people are so keen to get out to competition and the horses are not ready. You must try and get 120% at home before you

go out". If readers think that sounds familiar, it is just what George Morris quoted last month. In fact close your eyes and you could be back at Mount White with George. But that is as it should be, good instructors sing from the same hymn book. We live in a culture in Australia where if we don't like what one instructor is telling us, we go to someone else. They should all be telling us the same message, correcting the same faults. A Western Pleasure rider wants his horse 'on the aids' just as much as a dressage rider. Lessons are important, especially at the beginning, as that is what will stick for our whole career and it is important to start off the right way rather than by trial and error. The same can be said of the horse too.

Charlotte continues; "The first and most important thing you have to have is an independent seat and you have to keep working on that. The rider in any situation has to stay the same in the saddle. Your (dressage) seat stays the same, your hands and legs can move, but your seat remains still and in the same position. Basically you would want every horse to warm up in walk, trot and canter in a nice, soft frame and you should be able to balance the horse all the time in and out of those paces without a whole lot of impulsion or collection. The horse must be through, relaxed with his hind legs under him and moving into and accepting the contact. If it is through in the beginning, it will be through later on.

"The horse must carry you and move forward" were heard over and over again during the lessons. "It is not just Australia, it is a universal habit not to be forward enough. When I was in Europe I was told that all the time. It is the same for everyone at their various levels. I was told the same thing every day and thought, why can't I do it better? For some people to go forward and not grab the reins is a difficult concept and they must learn to feel that. Feeling is a difficult quality to teach and you cannot advance in dressage without it. It is also hard for some people to understand that without doing anything the horse should still keep going. I think self carriage is the most important lesson for a dressage horse to learn. If the horse is

in self carriage, you can push it to the next level. When I am warming up I like to be able to sit on a horse and keep it trotting and cantering without me having to always be pushing it along. Some riders, as soon as I tell them to sit still, the horse slows down".

Charlotte's lessons ran from green five year olds to Grand Prix, with a reasonable age variation in rider as well. Without exception all improved during the lesson. **Irene Luxmore** is a well known and popular Melbourne Royal steward. Irene is also a keen dressage competitor, but was experiencing some difficulties with her lovely five



*Relax, you must try and feel what is happening and feel when to ask". Irene Luxmore has her young mare working freely and softly forward.*

year old Thoroughbred/Welsh mare. At the start the mare was not keen to go forward. Charlotte takes charge; "She is not going forward and she has to be forward, going off your leg before we can do too much. Keep her on an even, steady contact, on a straight line and in front of your leg. Don't let her neck bend too much. Keep her straight and not too fast. Control her outside shoulder; do that and she can't get out of line. You must first of all go straight, if she is not you cannot do anything else. Keep your elbows flexed and your weight in the stirrups. Go forward, keep the rhythm and keep changing the rein, don't let her just get stuck on one rein. Every circle you make you need to know where to go, keep off the outside track, you must direct where she goes. Be steady with your hands and maintain your rhythm. Forward from trot to canter in the same tempo, make a smooth transition. Don't be too strong with your canter aids, as she will jump up and not forward, and take care not to take back with the hands when making a canter transition.

Be a little more forward with your body in the transitions. Relax, you must try and feel what is happening and feel when to ask". She's a miracle worker," Irene tells us as the mare trots happily forward past the gallery. Certainly the mare began to work very well and show some really nice movement.



*"Get the feeling of having him in front of your leg". Pip Grieve with her five year old Wolkenstein II gelding.*

**Pip Grieve** did well at the last Dressage with the Stars, finishing in seventh place after two rounds in the Four Year Old class with her Wolkenstein II

**C**harlotte Pedersen came to Australia from Denmark in 1988 and since that time has produced over a dozen Grand Prix horses and developed an enviable reputation as a dressage rider and coach.

Charlotte spends a couple of days every two weeks teaching at Rob and Gail Clay's well appointed Five Star Agistment in Cranbourne South. We jumped at the chance to observe for a day and talk to Charlotte about riding, teachers, the draw backs of living in the 'lucky country' and her recent sojourn in Europe with Lady Clarke's sensational Grand Prix horse, Come To Me.

Before Charlotte came to Australia, she completed the six year course required in Denmark to become a riding instructor. That is like a university degree with honours, and as such teaching riding is an honoured profession. Denmark, Germany, France and other European countries have structured programmes for both riders and teachers. That structure is also their strength. Most horses are kept at competition barns, riders receive regular lessons and are never far from a few words of advice, Charlotte explains. "The trip to Germany last year did not teach me anything new and it confirmed what I was doing was right. But it emphasised that I must do it so much better all the time and not come back to Australia and get slack. I have to remember how good and sharp the work has to be and how hard you must work and be on top of every little step. I know that you always think you are, but it was so nice over there to have someone all the time when I was riding to help. Not always to say a lot, but to say slow down or more forward. Everybody needs that. It was the same when I was in Denmark, everyone riding together, it is inspiring. Nothing is different over there, there is no miracle, it's just hard work.

gelding out of a Salute mare, *Regal Walk of Fame*. Like all teenagers, discipline is vital. "He has to do what we want him to do, not what he wants to do. Get the feeling of having him in front of your leg and when you halt make sure it is your idea not his. Even when you are walking on a long rein, make him walk forward in front of your leg". Pip began by riding her horse large, flexing to the inside then to the outside and making transitions within the trot. "Slowly shorten the reins, keep the outside rein and keep that rhythm". A lot of work was done with transitions to get the horse listening, obedient and soft; "trot, half halt, walk, trot half halt, walk". There was some resistance in the trot/canter transition. "Let him go forward in the transitions; he must be forward in downward transitions as well as the upward transitions". Experienced dressage rider, **Sharyn McCoombe** brought along her impressive big six year old chestnut by Flemmingh. Competing at Elementary, much of the lesson was devoted to self carriage. "He must go forward without you having to be at him all the time. He must develop self carriage, encourage him to carry himself. Ask and leave him alone, ask and leave him alone, he must carry you. It is not always about spurs or the whip, it is about your aids and feeling. Let him take the contact and let him be a little longer in the neck, it is easier for him to balance. Find a balance, be soft with both hands and sit; you can't carry him all the time. You want him to be loose, soft in the back and in balance. Keep his hind legs under him and in balance". Leg yielding, shoulder fore and travers were all used to get the big chestnut lighter and carrying himself. "Inside leg pushing to the outside shoulder. Don't just bury the spur, use it and stop, use it and stop. Get a reaction, make him move away and let him go forward. Now he is starting to understand what you want and carry himself. Get what you want and then soften".



"He must go forward without you having to be at him all the time, he must develop self carriage". Charlotte makes a point to Sharyn McCoombe.

**Natasha Altoff Kelly** brought along two of her charming imported Friesians, the handsome stallion, *Ebony Park Ave* that is competing at Advanced and a five year old mare. The well behaved, shiny black, Ave was quite a different type altogether from the other lessons, his magnificent mane in long, thick plaits that would fly about as he worked. He was totally unconcerned with what would be like being whacked with a thick rope. "Keep him forward, round and let him swing a bit more. Don't let him jump upward in the transitions, he must jump forward. Get him longer in the neck and *keep the rhythm forward*. Don't throw the reins away and let him run away; get his back legs under him. Keep the collection when you go forward, we still need to see the collection".



"Before you can get her up, you must get her soft". Natasha Altoff Kelly with her lovely, young Friesian mare.

The work continued on to flying changes. "When preparing for a flying change, don't pull on the inside rein. Concentrate on keeping him in balance and keep him straight for the changes. You need to sit still and get him to change straight". The young mare was elegant and a freer mover than the stallion. "Before you can get her up, you must get her soft", begins Charlotte. "Don't push her along, just go with the rhythm and concentrate on sitting up tall. You need to maintain your balance no matter what happens. You must give, but giving is not a total abandonment of the reins. Sticking your arms forward is not giving, that's just dropping the reins; maintain the contact". With the young horses especially it was certainly easy to see the improvement over the course of the lesson.

At just 22 **Claire Porz** has already trained in Denmark for a year and during that time bought the mare, Candi Ka. Claire has had the lovely, expressive eight year old for three and a half years and was heading to her first Prix St George competition the following week. "Make sure you are not helping her all the time,



Claire Porz executes a "nice uphill pirouette" with her mare Candi Ka.

always forward, but don't override her. Forward, balanced and nicely swinging through the back. Sit quiet and let her carry you. Take and give, make clear transitions and get her up in front of you. You want her to reach to the bridle, not down but up. You want the forehand up and you want the back legs pushing the front legs out of the way. *Half halt her before the corner, flex her and ride forward through the corner*. Use the outside rein to straighten her a little. In the lateral work, you should be able to ask for more or less, you should be able to ask for anything, but with the forehand always leading, uphill and light. Keep her with you, don't hurry". The work continued to pirouettes. "Have the forehand leading, don't let her get short, use the outside rein. You never want the hind legs to lead. She must listen to your legs the whole way, the outside leg for direction

and the inside leg for impulsion. Make her a little longer in the neck, more on the hind legs". And as the mare executes a lovely pirouette; "good, good that was a nice uphill pirouette to the right. There is always one side more difficult than the other". The lesson went on to include some work at piaffe. "Ask for just a few steps at a time with soft hands". The piaffe work was followed by a forward trot then back to the piaffe. "It is a matter of knowing when to ask, when the horse is ready".

FEI competitor, **Jane Crantock** brought her experienced Inter II horse, *Moliere*, and even with such an experienced combination, it is always important to run through the scales and brush up on the basics. "Don't let him anticipate what you are going to do. Not too much impulsion, get him supple first, quietly using your legs". Experienced horses often think they know best and Charlotte had Jane execute an interesting exercise to keep *Moliere* from taking over. The exercise began with half pass across the diagonal, which then became shoulder in about half way across. "This exercise keeps them thinking and stops them anticipating. Make it clear what you want and don't be afraid to ask; half halt and go again. Let him get longer in the neck and more forward. Relax in the shoulders, lower your hands and trust him more. Don't shorten

all the time, half halt in the moment, make him rounder, lower the neck and forward, give". The work went on to flying changes, with *Moliere* executing some lovely two time and tempi changes. "Make him rounder and lower in the neck, the changes are more flowing with his neck a little lower and he will get better marks".



"You must make him longer in the neck and not shorter and he will be more balanced". Jane Crantock and *Moliere* half pass across the arena.

Charlotte was as enthusiastic with the last lesson of the day as the first, but of course you would expect that of a professional. A career with horses involves much more than a course for a few months, it is a lifelong passion and study, with the aim being to both gain more and impart knowledge. "With horses you are always learning". Charlotte has in Lady Clarke's *Come To Me*, perhaps the horse of a lifetime and she intends to make the most of the opportunity. "I am an Australian now and my aim is to go to the WEG in 2010. 🐾

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