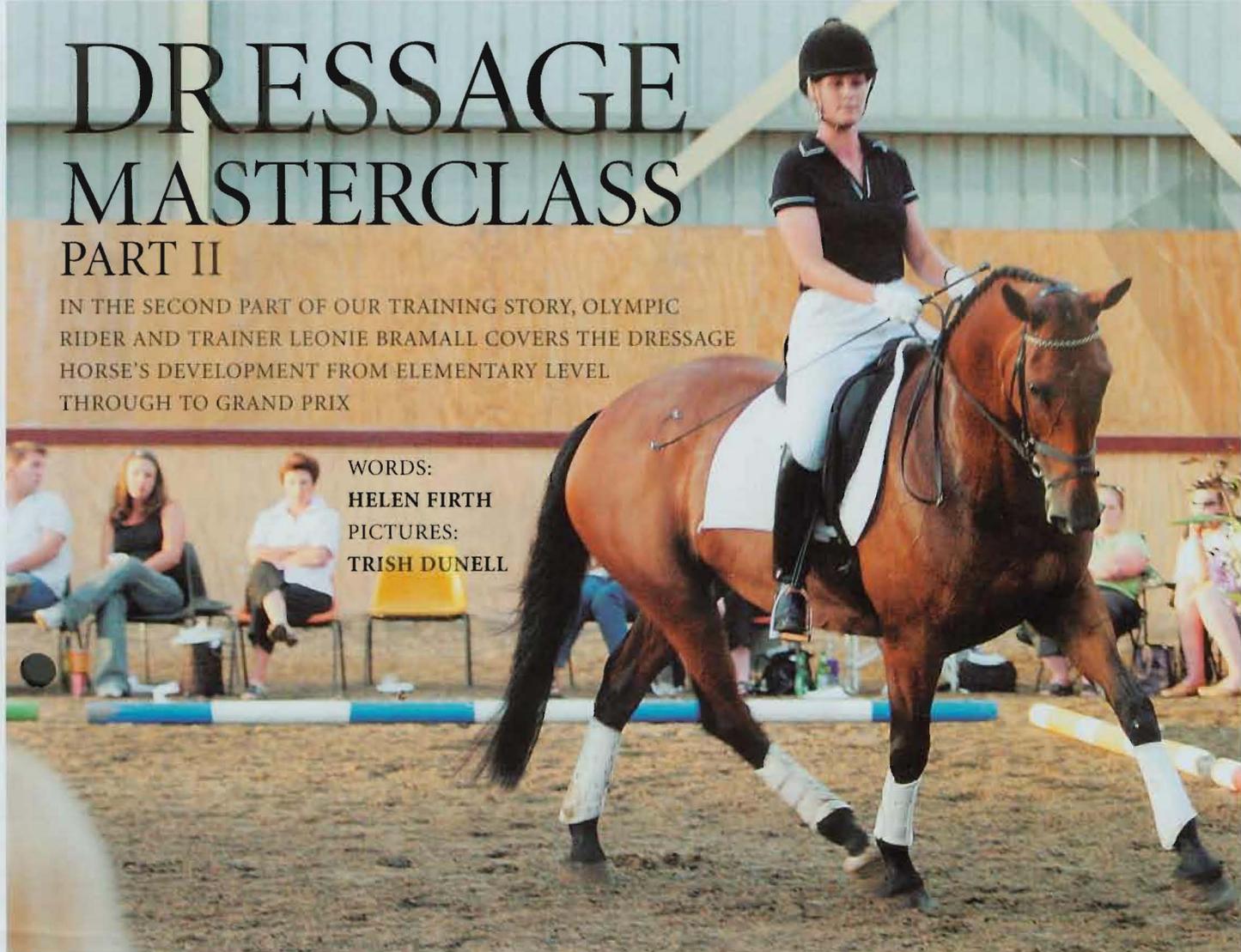


DRESSAGE MASTERCLASS PART II

IN THE SECOND PART OF OUR TRAINING STORY, OLYMPIC RIDER AND TRAINER LEONIE BRAMALL COVERS THE DRESSAGE HORSE'S DEVELOPMENT FROM ELEMENTARY LEVEL THROUGH TO GRAND PRIX

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Amanda Yearbury and Arioso: the Elementary horse is reasonably well-balanced, 'on the aids' and going forward to the contact

The elementary horse

The models: Amanda Yearbury and Arioso

At this point in the training, the horse has learned to balance fairly well, is 'on the aids', and is going forward to the contact. The lateral work, which began with leg-yield for the baby horse, can now progress to shoulder-in and travers.

Shoulder-in is an important basic tool that is used through the whole training, all the way to Grand Prix, says Leonie. The horse must be balanced, maintain an even rhythm and it should be on three tracks: outside hindleg; inside hindleg and outside foreleg; inside foreleg.

Leonie stresses the importance of the rider's outside leg, to keep the horse moving forwards through the outside shoulder, and to maintain the activity of the outside hindleg: "Everybody is very busy worrying about the inside hindleg, but when you make a circle or bend, the inside hindleg is

obviously going to come under anyway. The outside hindleg is just as important."

Similarly, in travers (quarters-in), the horse moves forward around the rider's inside leg, while being activated through the outside leg and rein.

Leonie likes to see her riders perform these exercises on the inside track. "Don't use the rail as a baby-sitter for your outside leg," she explains. "I do a lot of shoulder-in without the help of the rail, to make the rider use both legs, through to both reins. And it must truly be shoulder-in: we want to move the shoulder in off the track, not push the quarters out."

In the canter work, Amanda demonstrates the medium canter and working canter, with the transitions between; Leonie tells her to think of breathing out in the medium, and breathing in for the working canter.

Moving on to simple changes and counter canter, Leonie wants Amanda to cut the corner before asking for counter-canter from walk, not riding too deep into the corner. At first, the mare makes several mistakes, and Leonie is quick to say the horse should not be told off for these errors.

"Never punish a horse for doing a flying change. This horse is trying to do the right job, so it's not a bad thing. Also, there's no

Leonie Bramall

Canadian-born Leonie moved to Germany at the age of 18, serving her apprenticeship at the stables of Johann Hinnemann, where she stayed for 15 years. She has ridden some of the top stallions in Germany, including Relevant and Rohdiamant.

Leonie represented Canada at the 1992 and 1996 Olympic Games and 1994 World Equestrian Games with her Oldenburg mare Gilbona.

Today, Leonie is based at Gestut Muhlenort, a dressage training and breeding stable in the heart of the Hanoverian breeding area. She competes four horses at advanced level, including the breeding stallions Wild Dance, Don Marcello and Boticello. In 2004, Leonie and Boticello notched up 15 advanced wins.



Advanced: half-pass trot, beginning changes

The models: Ben Conn and Rubinstar (owned by Haydee Wells-Parmenter)

Rubinstar has warmed up outside and is in a good frame already, so Ben straight away rides some shoulder-in as preparation for the half-pass.

"Shoulder-in is the foundation of all this lateral work, and it is perfect to get the horse listening, on the aids, in front of the leg, establishing a bend and in a rhythm. From that base we can carry on," says Leonie. "This horse is concentrating on his rider, listening with his inside ear; he has a good attitude, with a nice expression on his face."

Ben then rides travers across the diagonal, and immediately we can see this horse is further along in his training: he comes out of the corner bent correctly and his ears are level – a good gauge of whether the horse is flexed correctly.

"If one ear or the other is tilting downwards, he's not correctly flexed and that's nothing to do with the half-pass, that's your basic training," she explains.

In the half-pass, Rubinstar shows good crossing of his hind leg, a good rhythm and bend. In the downwards transition, he stays in front of the leg, and immediately produces a clean, marching walk. He is slightly behind the vertical at times but, says Leonie, this is due to a bit of tension on the horse's part.

"He's being very obedient, but he's a little bit worried internally. Horses worry – they are not meant to be ridden in front of people! – and they run away if they're scared. It's your job as a rider to teach them to try and stay with you. This horse is doing a really fine job."

In canter, Ben again prepares the horse by riding in shoulder-fore, which is important for developing strength in the hindleg and ensures the horse will later be jumping straight in the flying changes.

This progresses to adding renvers on the circle in canter: Ben hollows the horse around his outside leg and flexes him slightly to the outside. This adds more weight to the outside hindleg; he can then softly flex to the inside and take the energy collected on the outside hindleg forward. Leonie likes this exercise to get the horses working 'through' and straight.

"It's just a little bit, it's not throwing his quarters out or in. It's gradual loading and teaching the horse to use his body in a different way. The more range of motion he is used to and supplied into, the healthier he's going to stay and the stronger he will get," she says.

Next, Ben rides travers on the circle in canter. Leonie explains this isn't so much about pushing the quarters in, as asking the horse to bend



Ben and Rubinstar in left half-pass, and right half-pass



Rubinstar in walk – a horse with character and charisma

through the ribs and bring his outside hindleg more under. The trick is to get the horse to soften through the ribs and bring his back up by using his stomach muscles and allowing more room for the hindleg to step under. This travers and renvers is also a good set up for moving towards the canter pirouettes.

Preparation for the flying changes involves lots of simple changes, which has already been addressed at Elementary level. Rubinstar is well trained and able to execute good and correct flying changes on demand.

When the horse changes early, ahead of the rider's aid, Leonie's key point is not to punish the horse – the change itself was good, so "we're positive, we're happy!" she says.

At one point, Rubinstar starts to get a little strong in the canter, and she tells Ben to walk.

"At this moment, the key is not the flying change. The quality of the flying change is absolutely dependent on the quality of the canter. If the canter is not good enough, a red light should go on in my head that I've got to change something. Why do I want to teach my horse to do something wrong? So I think, quick, change of plan....I'm going to do a volte and get my horse back on his hindlegs and listening to me."

Overall, Leonie likes Rubinstar very much, describing him as a horse who is interested in his rider and also possessing the essential charisma required for a top-level dressage horse. **HCP**



Top: Amanda and Arioso in medium canter. Centre: Asking for counter-canter. Above: A big pat to finish

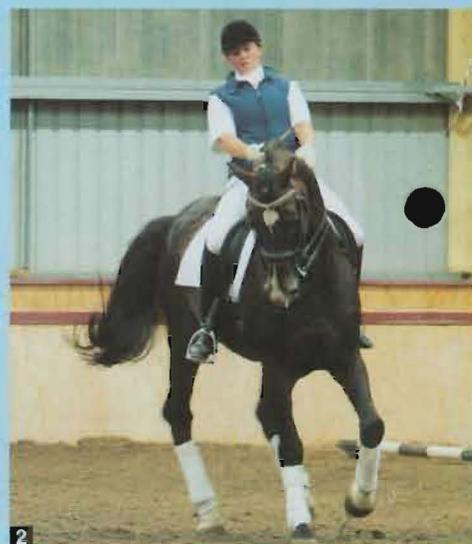
sense in punishing the horse for breaking in the counter-canter. It's just a question of balance; the horse is finding it easier to try and switch leads." Amanda is very patient, stopping and re-starting until she eventually manages the counter-canter, receiving praise from Leonie for tactful riding.

"The horse made a mistake several times,

so the rider has to decide, what do I do? If you decide to tap with the whip and make more tension, you have to assess whether that is going to be positive or negative. In this case, repetition and trying again was the better decision. The horse kept the softness, coped with the situation and did the exercise correctly."

H P

Sequence: Jody and Landioso, canter pirouette



Grand Prix: pirouettes, piaffe and passage

The models: Jody Hartstone and Landioso

Leonie recognizes Landioso from Europe (he is an approved Holsteiner stallion), and is pleased to see this older horse being kept in good shape and still working. She points out his distinctive Holsteiner movement, describing him as an active and 'airy' kind of a horse, with cadence, who is motivated on his own: "He's bringing us with him."

To demonstrate working through the canter pirouette, Jody prepares by collecting the canter on the circle. Obviously, a very high degree of collection is necessary for the pirouette, but it's also important the horse stays active and Jody continues to move the horse through her outside aids. Landioso is experienced and knows what's required, offering collection straight away. He takes the weight behind and pushes up through the wither.

"A good pirouette has a maximal eight canter strides and the horse should keep his activity, staying centred and turning out of his hindleg,"

explains Leonie. "I like to think of a clock: the hands of the clock are centred in the middle. The horse's forehand should be turning."

Landioso deftly demonstrates both good and bad examples of the canter pirouette, although at one point he gets stuck, and he and Jody have a slight 'discussion'.

"The horse was disobedient. He got behind her leg and it went to the stuck spot..." observes Leonie. "Jody decided it was a mess and to start again, and went in the second time and did a really good pirouette. This was the right deci-

sion – you don't want to create more tension and negativity. "Similarly, when Landioso has a little spook on the short side, Leonie is quick to forgive: "Okay, he saw something he didn't like. Again, it is a horse, not a machine, so give him the benefit of the doubt. He makes a mistake, we all do, and he's allowed to make a mistake."

Between the collected work, Leonie gets Jody to ride forward in canter down the long side, always thinking about building energy: "That's how you create an athlete, not by riding in the dead canter."

The demonstration ends with some very nice tempi changes, followed by piaffe and passage. The piaffe and passage is correct and good quality, so Leonie keeps it brief, finishing with an extended trot.

"We're not going to go on and on, because this is not going to get any better. The work is really good, so we're going to leave this horse there."



bove: Jody and Landioso. The stallion has an active, cadenced way of moving



Leonie's Training Tips

- **Don't get stuck on an exercise.** It's better to do two or three really good flying changes with no mistakes, than to do 15 before you finally get a clean one
- **Be creative.** Don't always ride movements in the same place. Decrease and increase the energy
- **When flexing horses,** always think of stretching the outside, not shortening the inside
- **Do interval training.** Don't do 30 or 40 canter pirouettes one after the other; instead, load the horse's muscles and ask him to work, then let him walk again. This also gives the horse a chance to think about what he's doing
- **The best possible horse** is developed by using the maximal range of motion possible, not just in collection, but also in extension. The more range of motion we can put the horse through, the more obedient and supple he will become