

Melissa Creswick continues a learning legacy during Linda O' Carroll Memorial Adult Amateur Southern Clinic.

by Nicole Bhathal, CDS Southern Regional Director • Photos: Nancy Albright

In 1997, the California Dressage Society started a series of clinics to honor Linda O'Carroll, who donated an endowment to fund Adult Amateurs' education. For two decades, amateur dressage riders who normally would not have an opportunity to train with top professionals receive the chance to learn from the best due to the generosity of Mrs. O'Carroll. Each CDS Chapter sponsors at least one qualified rider annually.



Linda O'Carroll rode in one of the early CDS Amateur Clinics as the representative of the Foothills Chapter. She loved the experience, commenting often on the wonderfully helpful lessons and the wealth of knowledge she picked up from watching all of the other lessons.

As has often been pointed out, the base of that pyramid which represents the discipline of dressage is filled with the Adult Amateurs who juggle work, family, finances, health and any number of other impediments to participate. Mrs. O'Carroll was such an individual; her choices were always for the good of the horse and for the benefit of the sport.

This year, a total of 13 riders participated in the Southern Regional Adult Amateur Clinic at W Farms (owned by David and Alisa Wilson) in Chino Hills. Additional sponsors included CDS Inland Communities Chapter, CDS San Juan Capistrano Chapter and Five Star Sporthorses.

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For 2018, the featured clinician was Melissa Creswick, a USEF “S” rated dressage judge and an “R” rated sporthorse judge. She has earned her USDF Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals. She owned and was head trainer of the Clovis Training Center, a full-service dressage training and show facility for 25 years. Melissa is on the Board of Directors for the California Dressage Society. She has been a past President of CDS and Vice President of USDF. Melissa was the trainer of the State Champion Quadrille team at the Annual Show in the late 1980s.



Melissa’s goal was to bring her experience both in the judge’s booth and as a trainer to clarify the journey of the dressage discipline. She is an advocate of all breeds and shared her struggles up the levels on horses of all kinds. During Friday’s Meet and Greet, Melissa told the riders that she “did not earn her gold medal until age 65, so there is hope for you all.” The riders each gave their riding backgrounds and built camaraderie amongst the group knowing that everyone struggles from time to time.



Given Melissa’s extensive knowledge in sporthorse judging, Pat Hart from the Pomona Chapter, who rode her FEI KWPN gelding WeeJee, in the clinic, commented, “I really appreciated that Melissa has a lot of experience with conformation, and I thought her evaluations regarding horses’ strengths and weaknesses helped to manage riders’ expectations with regard to a particular horse and allow them to really focus on getting the most out of all of their mounts’ positive attributes. I also enjoyed how much Melissa wanted all the riders to succeed and was

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willing to try different things to help each rider improve. The clinic gave me a few new ideas to incorporate into my riding bag of tools.”

Michellie Jones of the San Diego Chapter, who rode her young Westfalen mare Rafina 16, echoed other riders’ sentiments about discovering new approaches to familiar training during the clinic. “I feel it’s important to have access to different trainers as they can all be addressing the same things but all of a sudden you have an ‘aha’ moment because someone new said it in a different way that comes together and ‘bingo!’ I really appreciated her constantly reminding us to be open minded when it comes to training.” Melissa was constantly saying, “showing is polished, but training is messy” to encourage her riders to take risks and not be afraid to make a mistake. Melissa understands the pyramid of training and how much hard work and persistence must go into finding harmony with your horse.

The clinic drew much interest, and auditors (comprised of riders, trainers, judges and CDS Chapter Chairs) attended both days. CDS would like to thank Melissa Creswick and W Farms for hosting an outstanding educational clinic.