

Education and competition: The circle of life in dressage.

by Nan Meek

Education, or competition? Art, or sport? Dressage is full of such weighty questions. Are dressage riders who compete compromising principles of perfection in pursuit of shiny trophies? Are dressage riders who don't compete afraid to put their training to the test?

A wise trainer once explained to me that the purpose of competition is to test your education to determine if it is as well established as you think it is (rarely) or if it can be improved (always).

Education prepares you for competition, and competition shows you where you need more education. I call it the circle of life in dressage: train, show (oops – that shoulder-in isn't very good), go back to train some more. Repeat, and repeat, and repeat.

George Williams Clinic - August 18-19



When it comes to education, George Williams could write the book. He hasn't – yet – possibly because he's too busy training, teaching, coaching, traveling and serving on countless boards and committees.

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However, on August 18-19, George will bring his knowledge and experience to The Horse Park at Woodside for a dressage clinic presented by the San Francisco Peninsula Chapter of the California Dressage Society. Riders include juniors, adult amateurs and professionals, with horses ranging from Training Level to Intermediaire II. There will be something for everyone to watch, learn and take home to improve their riding, from this triple-threat trainer-rider-coach. (For more info, visit www.sfpcds.org.)

What can riders and auditors expect? Expertise, experience and a perspective on dressage that is second to none.

As the USEF Dressage Youth Coach and Chef d'Equipe, George travels extensively to observe, help select and coach the young riders who may very well one day represent the USA on teams for the Olympics, WEG or World Cup. As USDF President, his influence on the dressage community reaches from the grassroots all the way to the top of the podium.

A serious dressage student since 1973, the then 18-year-old George studied at the Reitinstitut von Neindorff where he earned his German Bronze Rider Medal. Back home in the US, he became a resident trainer and rider alongside Karl Mikolka at Tempel Farms in Wadsworth, Illinois. Twenty years later, he trained in Germany with the former US Dressage Team Coach and Olympic gold medalist, Klaus Balkenhol.

George applied his classical dressage education to the competition arena with great success on many horses, perhaps most famously with Chuck and Joann Smith's mare Roche, winning an unprecedented three-time Dressage at Devon Grand Prix and Grand Prix Freestyle, 2005 United States Equestrian Federation/Collecting Gaits National Grand Prix Champion, team bronze Nations Cup at CHIO Aachen, fifth at the 2003 World Cup in Sweden, United States Dressage Federation Grand Prix and Grand Prix Freestyle Horse of the Year.

Young horse titles grace George's resume as well. For Betsy Juliano and her Havensafe Farm, he showed the Oldenburg gelding Don Bailey to Reserve Champion at the 2009 USEF Developing Horse Championships, and the Oldenburg mare Horizon to Reserve Champion in the Four-Year-Old division at the 2011 USEF Young Horse Championships.

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