

## California Riding Reader Writes...

### Auditing An Olympian

*Auditing is much more than listening at a Charlotte Bredahl clinic.*

by Sarah Borrey

I recently audited Charlotte Bredahl's "From the Judge's Perspective" clinic. As a beginning level dressage rider, when I signed up to audit a clinic with Olympic bronze medalist Charlotte Bredahl, I anticipated that it would simply be a chance to watch nice riders on beautiful horses. I thought that, because I am not an advanced rider, I would not understand Charlotte's training tips to more sophisticated riders. Boy, was I mistaken! Auditing this clinic was one of the best learning experiences I have ever had in my quest to learn dressage. Here's why:

During Charlotte's clinic, the auditors didn't just listen to Charlotte's insightful comments. Charlotte also invited the auditors to participate in the clinic. In between rides, she asked questions and explained certain points in more detail depending on the auditors' feedback. After getting over the fear of blurting out something silly, some of us found ourselves discussing the theory and practical aspects of dressage with Charlotte Bredahl, a former Olympian!

The clinic took place at the beautiful equestrian property of Pollyrich Farm in the Central Coast town of Buellton. Against a backdrop of rolling pastures, each rider warmed up and rode a full test of his or her choice. Charlotte's training as a judge showed as she approached each horse and rider pair with the utmost objectivity. Throughout the tests, Charlotte gave us her score on each movement and explained her reasoning, pointing out specific aspects of the ride. The riders clearly appreciated the opportunity to hear what scores they might earn for each movement, and also the reasons underlying the score. Charlotte consistently listed the pros and cons of each movement to explain how she arrived at a score.

While coaching riders on movements for better scores, Charlotte's specificity was uncanny. For instance, after telling a rider that his half pass needed more forward energy, Charlotte directed the rider to move his outside hip and shoulder slightly further back. Immediately, the horse's half pass flowed forward with greater intensity as if a weight had been lifted off the powerful gelding.

#### Terrific Take-Aways

Charlotte's practical tips build upon one another so that even a lower level rider could understand how leg yielding plays a role in training the horse for a correct half pass. She weaved a common thread through each lesson: the importance of the inside leg. Bend, suppleness and forward energy comes from yielding and responding to the inside leg:

- Before a transition, your horse should feel like "butter" in your inside rein.
- On a circle, your horse should "honestly" move forward off your inside leg.
- And at the higher levels, for a proper inside bend during half pass, leg yielding reminds the horse to bend around the inside leg.

Each explanation Charlotte gave to riders was specific to their level, the movement they were riding and their horse's training and ability, yet each piece related to the basic and general principles Charlotte emphasized throughout the clinic. It all made sense!

Another element of Charlotte's style that made listening to her simply inspirational was her enthusiasm and appreciation for harmony, no matter the level and experience of the horse and rider. While watching a young 3-year-old picking up the canter, Charlotte focused on and praised any amount of canter from the youngster. While working with a rider to relax her horse, Charlotte emphasized the rider's consistent and softer aids, which resulted in a much more harmonious pair at the end of the lesson, much to the rider's delight. At the upper levels, while working on flying lead changes, Charlotte praised each and every effort the horse made toward flying changes, reassuring the rider that the effort and willingness of her horse is what is key at this initial point in the training. Charlotte directed her positive feedback at both the horse and rider. This dual perspective illustrated that harmony comes from the combination of a rider providing clear, fair aids, with a good riding position, and a horse honestly responding to the aids.

So, if you have doubts about auditing a clinic for fear that you would not learn much, think again. For me, Charlotte's interactive presentation made this clinic just as effective as a break-through riding lesson. Her insights are an invaluable peek at how a judge evaluates a horse and rider at different levels, and her enthusiasm and positive approach reminds all riders that dressage is a process. Charlotte is an awesome clinician. If you ever have the chance to listen to her teach, do so. You may not just be listening, after all!



*Author Sarah Borrey lives and rides in Northern California's Morgan Hill. She has a 2-year-old by Charlotte Bredahl's stallion, Windfall, she trains with Erica Poseley and she loves dressage for many reasons, most notably because it requires both focus and calmness.*

