

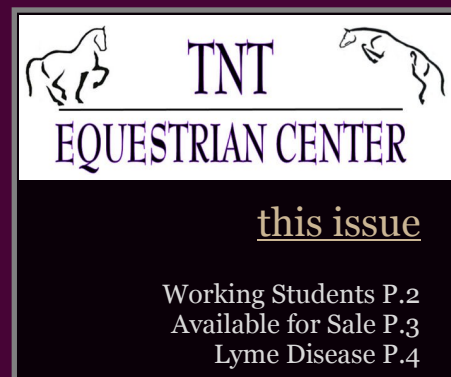
Top Hat

Building an Equestrian Community
Spring 2011

Why Dressage?



You may have heard it said that all horses should learn dressage. But why? This statement makes very little sense if you consider dressage to be a discipline devoted to doing fancy (or repetitive!) movements and patterns inside a square box. You might ask yourself, "How could that possibly help MY horse?" His job is to jump, take me down trails, or just pack me around. The answer starts with explaining what dressage training is.



Dressage is a system of gymnastic training designed to improve the horse's strength, agility, and balance while being ridden. But why must he be improved? A horse is already strong, agile, and balanced - more or less, depending on his particular conformation. However, his situation changes radically when weight is placed on his back. To understand this, it is important to have at least a basic understanding of how your horse's back functions.

A helpful visualization is to consider your horse's topline to be like a suspension bridge. A system of ligaments (imagine thick, stretchy cords) run from your horse's poll all the way down to his hocks, attaching at various points to the skeleton. These ligaments act to put tension on the bones, thereby holding up the horse's back. For instance, the nuchal ligament attaches to the horse's poll (between his ears), runs along the top of his neck and attaches again behind his withers. When the horse's poll is lowered and tension is put on this ligament, it acts to pull up the withers and the area of the horse's back right behind them. On the other end of the system, when the horse flexes his LS joint (tucks his pelvis) the ligaments and muscles that run from the middle of his back, through the LS joint (loin), and over his hindquarters, act to pull the spine up from the other end of the "bridge." So, for the horse's back to be "up", his dorsal ligament system has to be under tension in the shape of a rainbow or arch. Forcing the horse to lower his poll or allowing him to passively drop his head does not mean that his back is up. Tension is only correctly applied to this ligament system (and therefore only acts to lift the back) if the horse is actively stretching down and forward.

To make it clearer, get down on all hands and knees. Now do a "cat stretch" - arch your back and tuck your rear like a frightened cat. Extend the back of your neck so that the back of the top of your head (where the soft spot is) pushes forward, like you were trying to point toward the ground in front of you with it, all the while maintaining the stretch through your back and rear. This is similar to the way the horse needs to use his back while carrying a rider. While you are in this position, relax the front of your neck. Make sure you are not clenching your jaw or tightening the front of your neck - you could even allow your mouth to open a little. Remember that feeling of strength and support in your back.

For comparison, allow your back to go slack, and pull your chin into your chest. Feel a difference? Do you feel the extreme tension in your shoulder blades, neck and base of your skull? Do you feel the weakness in your lower back? Now forcibly hollow your back. Push your belly button towards the ground and stick your rear in the air - hopefully no one is watching! At this point, just imagine (I say imagine because you could easily strain yourself in this position - consider how your horse might feel if forced into this posture) that someone pushed hard on your forehead to shove your chin and head back into your chest. Or even down and in as if they had something tied to your mouth

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and could force your chin in. Notice all the areas of strain. Do you think if you were a horse you could move freely? Now lets go one step further and imagine doing these things while carrying a weight on your back. Let's assume that the weight is really good at staying in one place over the strongest part of your back. How much strain do you feel and where? If you were forced into this position, where would you resist?

Further, begin to imagine that the weight on your back is not good at staying over the strongest part of your back. Visualize the weight sliding back to the bottom of your rib cage or LS joint. What if it leaned forward over your shoulders or lurched to one side? What if that weight bumped and flopped up and down? How much more do you think your horse would be inclined to hollow and resist the "rider?" All of this is simply an exercise to get you think about the particular strains and fears the horse may experience when being ridden.

Dressage is the system that teaches your horse how to carry you in a way that preserves his longevity, comfort, balance, and ability to perform athletically. When a rider climbs on board for the first time, if the horse has not been prepared physically or psychologically, he will most naturally hollow his back, contracting the long muscles of his back while the ligament system goes slack. This is especially true if the horse is fearful of or feels restricted by the rider or the saddle. Heightened nervousness will cause him to contract his back. The pattern of behavior and way of moving that a horse develops in the very beginning of training are patterns that will be most natural to him throughout his training. This is why it's much harder to correct improper training than to start off with a solid and positive foundation. Of course, conformation also plays a big role in how a horse carries himself. Fortunately, dressage training was intended not only to bring out the best in a stellar individual but, perhaps even more importantly, to help the lesser individual use himself to his own optimal potential. This is why, when applied knowledgeably and effectively, dressage training can strengthen and improve virtually every horse working in any discipline.

~ Shannon



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WORKING STUDENTS WELCOME!

TNT is reinstating the working student program. Working students are students who are employed in exchange for lessons at the barn. They must be at least 16 years of age, responsible, reliable, able to follow directions, and hard workers. One of the advantages of being a working student is the opportunity to learn more about horsemanship and horse care. Tasks that working students will learn and be asked to perform include: stall cleaning, bedding, aisle maintenance, feeding, bucket scrubbing, grooming, tacking, turnout etc. Tasks will be assigned on the basis of the student's capabilities. Students need to have some horse experience in the form of previous lessons (either at TNT or somewhere else). Working students can expect to volunteer for the first three hours of time at the barn to be trained on basic tasks and to learn the barn rules and procedures. After training, students will be compensated at a rate of \$5 - \$8 per hour of work performed. Students who accomplish more will earn more. Earned hours may be applied to lessons (private or group) and other instructional opportunities. Hours earned must be applied with in 30 days of being earned. Students must be available at times when work is needed - most often during afternoons and Saturdays. If you are interested in learning more, please call 330-461-2318.





Mia enjoying some early spring sun.

Ms. Impressive Affair



Spring Price: \$1800

Ms. Impressive Affair, known as Mia, is an attractive, big bodied, registered AQHA mare. She has excellent bloodlines and was shown as a halter horse. She is a great walk/trot mare and has both a jog and a long English trot. She has a big canter and is still working at collection and balance.

Mia has been used for lessons for advanced beginners. She is nearly bomb-proof in a ring but does need a rider with some confidence on trail. She will go out alone but only if the rider gives her confidence through a strong seat. Mia isn't the ideal beginner's horse as she can be pushy, but she would do well at a walk and trot with a more novice rider if she were also worked by a stronger rider. Would consider a trade on a more "rank" beginner-friendly horse or dressage type horse.

Seeking a school horse! Must be beginner safe and easily able to carry 180lbs; good on the lunge line; three clear gaits on both solid leads; and sound. May consider an older horse or long term lease if sound. Reasonably priced!

Please contact Shannon.

Loyal Lisa

Loyal Lisa, called "Roxy" at the barn, has three solid, SMOOTH gaits and a pretty "dressage" trot. She is sired by Northern Lights RAH, and her dam is Lady Luck TOF. At 14.1 hands with a sturdy build, Lisa is appropriate for an average sized adult rider. She'd make an excellent youth mount for English, western, games, and maybe some jumping. Please contact Shannon for details.



When Ticks Bite

Contributed by Kris Speller

It's a scary thought that a tiny blood-leaching tick can cause harm to your pony, but the fact is about 75% of horses living in tick infested areas have positive antibodies of a bacterial illness known as Lyme Disease. An illness most commonly transmitted through tick feeding on your horse between 12-24 hours, Lyme Disease is multi-systemic infection affecting your horse's joints, musculoskeletal system and neurological system. Interestingly enough, only 10% of horses bitten will be affected by the disease, while the other 90% will serve as carriers.

Like any concerned owner you wonder, how can you detect and treat Lyme disease? Unfortunately diagnosis doesn't have a simple answer, but several overlapping symptoms are observed over time. Your horse will undergo behavioral changes, which may range from increased irritability to an unwillingness to work. An obvious shift in lameness is observed where a general stiffness will move about the legs, and your horse may suffer from a possible fever. Diagnostic options don't stop at observation. If you think there's a chance your horse might be affected, you can try x-rays, exams, and blood work as well.

Although there isn't a quick fix vaccine to rid your horse of the disease, treatment is actually quite simple. Over several weeks of taking antibiotics, your horse will go back to his normal self. The disease is an acute illness and is not contagious, but medication comes with a hefty price.

The simplest way to treat Lyme Disease is prevention. Familiarize yourself with areas most prone to ticks: the northeast, mid-Atlantic regions, Minnesota, Wisconsin and northern California. Lyme disease is relatively low in Ohio but, it's still important to take precaution, especially when ticks are present in the fall and early spring.

Check your horses often for ticks with daily grooming. You should especially look out for areas around your horse's head, belly, neck, legs and under the tail. Also, check your pasture for nest areas such as tall grass, brush and wood piles. It doesn't hurt to apply tick repellent before your horse goes out for a romp in the pasture. Lastly, if you are riding in tick-infested areas, wash your horse's legs and prone areas with a high-powered hose to get rid of the ticks before they attach. Lyme disease does not have to control your horse's life. Awareness is the first step towards prevention.



CESSNA CLASSICAL HORSEMANSHIP
at TNT Equestrian Center
OPEN HOUSE
Saturday, June 11, 2011
10am—2pm

- ◆ 11am—Demo lesson addressing common issues for female riders
- ◆ 1pm—Demo training session exploring groundwork and exercises under saddle for conformation issues affecting correct use of the top line
- ◆ Farm tours & other fun activities!

TNT Equestrian Center

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Top Hat is produced by Julianne Bedel. Have an idea for a story? Comments and suggestions are welcome! Contact Julianne at tntnewsnow@aol.com.