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Dressage for Jumpers...Riding with Ruth Jaclyn Duff



Dressage and basic flatwork are important to any show jumpers career. The majority of the problems I face in the show ring come from weaknesses in my flat work. As a rider trying to move up through the Grand Prix ranks I have realized the importance of integrating good dressage work into my training program. The ultimate goal is to be able to maintain what I have achieved through my dressage work between the obstacles on course.

I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to work with Dressage trainer Ruth Koch on many occasions. Ruth is a highly regarded Level III Dressage coach and has help select and coach the Junior and Young rider dressage teams. I recently joined

up with Ruth in Thermal, California during our off week for some training. In particular, I had her help me with my new horse As Di Azurro, as there is a lot of room for improvement in our flat work. One thing I struggle with on course is he is a very big horse and has a massive stride. Towards the end of the course he gets long and can be difficult in the mouth. The first thing Ruth said to me was, "It is not about the mouth," as I was demonstrating how my horse likes to pull and root when I ask for collection. Through a series of steps we worked at getting my horse to give through the body which in turn made him supple and allowed me to collect.

Ruth teaches the classic basics that any good rider, dressage or show jumper should know. The classic basics are often referred to as "The Scale of Training," and referenced as a pyramid with the six elements- Rhythm, suppleness, contact, impulsion, straightness and collection. Using this framework we were able to make my horse more rideable and obedient.

Source: Dressage Training Pyramid www.dressage-academy.com

Exercise

We started on a 20 meter circle and worked on establishing a consistent rhythm. Once we were able to maintain that we worked on suppleness by changing the size of the circle by moving my horse in and out on the circle while maintaining a consistent even contact on his mouth. As I moved my horse in and out on the circle Ruth stressed impulsion- getting my horses hind legs underneath him and pushing. Once I was able to maintain an even contact he was very straight. We then worked on going forward on a big circle and then spiraling in to a small circle until he was nearly doing a pirouette at the canter. The end result was: rhythm, suppleness, contact, impulsion, straightness, collection and a horse that felt like he could jump any technical test in the ring. I often do this exercise during my morning flat because I find it really works to get my big horse collected with power so he can jump any test in front of him.

