



HUBERTUS HUFENDIEK -

UNDERSTANDING *dressage* BASICS

HUBERTUS HUFENDIEK AND CHRISTINE WEAL WORK TOGETHER ON REFINING THE BASICS TO IMPROVE THE HIGHER-LEVEL DRESSAGE MOVEMENTS. ASHLEIGH HENWOOD WAS THERE.

OUR RIDER

Christine has a long list of titles to her name; she has represented New Zealand numerous times, been National Advanced champion twice and has either won or been in the placings in the New Zealand Young Dressage Horse Championship each time she has competed. In addition to her own success in the dressage arena, she is a very talented trainer, developing advanced dressage riders, national champions and international representatives. Christine has spent time in Europe expanding her own knowledge and experience and is committed to continuing her own learning as well as that of the people and horses she teaches.

THE HORSE

Diego is an imported seven-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding by Wynton. Christine had had him for about eight months at the time of the lesson, but had only ridden him for about six weeks beforehand. He has a super spunky personality and a great work ethic with loads of scope and lots of different gears for which Christine is still finding the buttons. Diego has recently started flying changes, and Christine is looking at taking him to his first shows this year, aiming for Prix St Georges by the end of the season, with all going well.

Meet our trainer

Hubertus Hufendiek is highly regarded all around the world, and is considered by some of the world's best to be a rare talent. He took up the reins at ten years old, but confesses he had no interest in dressage at that stage. When he was only 14, he started training with legendary Olympic dressage champion Hubertus Schmidt. At 16 he came across his first Grand Prix horse, and at 17 he was awarded the Gold Badge of the German Equestrian Federation for winning ten tests at Prix St Georges level, as well as experiencing success at Grand Prix.

Hubertus is now a Pferdewirtschafts Meister and specialises in the FEI work. Not only a professional horse trainer – with students all around the world, including in New Zealand, Australia, America, Austria and Switzerland - he regularly presents at major international seminars. In 2010 he passed his Professional Riding Instructor's Masters degree with Distinction and started his own competition and training barn in Bad Salzuflen.



Christine riding shoulder fore to help with her contact

ALL ABOUT THE CONTACT

"It is really important to pay attention to the contact, to make sure the horse isn't too strong in the contact or dropping out of it," Hubertus explains. "If the contact isn't good then the rest of the work won't be good." He recommends using some shoulder fore or counter flexion, for example, to encourage the horse to sit better in either rein, depending on where the issue lies. He reminds students not to get stuck trying to make it look pretty and sacrificing teaching the horse the correct way of going.

"If it becomes hard and the horse comes above the bit in a moment, put him a little deeper there and make sure he is filling up both reins with a nice even contact," Hubertus encourages. "Keep the contact, don't give it away because then you are left with nothing. It is really important that the horse doesn't become empty in the reins."

BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR HALF HALTS

Hubertus reminds all of his riders to half halt and collect the horse more, then send it on again, always testing the horse's reactions and strengthening it at the same time. If the horse slows down and gets a little lazy, especially with the hind legs, the rider should not be afraid to remind him to keep going with a little tap with the whip to get the jump back into the canter.



Christine rides Diego a little deeper to get a nice even contact

ADJUSTABILITY

"Test your horse's reactions by asking him to come back and take a smaller but quicker step and then go forward again. When you are asking him to come back to you, a common mistake is for the horse to take a smaller, slower stride when you really want to aim for a quick stride that pushes up off the ground."

"If he slows down then don't be afraid to remind him to stay quick with a little tap of the whip," Hubertus encourages. "When you ask the horse forward, it is important to remember again that the horse needs to power up and off the arena rather than run flat through it. Always be aiming for the jump, especially in the canter -

and keep that hind leg quick and super active."

"Don't be afraid to try and see what happens - if the horse makes a mistake then you use that as a training opportunity and correct him so he learns for next time," he explains.

CHANGE THE POSITIONING WITHIN THE PACE

Riders should not be afraid to move the horse into shoulder fore, shoulder in, or even travers to test his suppleness and roundness.

"Quite often the horse will be going very well on a circle or in a straight line, but struggles when you put it into an exercise. He might get flat, hollow or lose rhythm. By challenging him in an exercise

in trot or canter, you are testing him to see where the holes are that you need to fix, all the while strengthening the horse and conditioning him for the work that he needs to do in dressage."

Diego likes to bend and he finds the shoulder fore positioning in the canter very easy, but Christine explains that sometimes when she asks for a lateral movement he gets a little stuck. Hubertus encourages her not to be afraid of changing the positioning to encourage Diego to let go and be nice and loose and supple.

"Ask him to bend, push him over into the outside rein and be sure not to lose the outside rein, because if you do that then you will lose the shoulder."

Top tip:

Always ride lines that you find in your tests. It is no good riding random sized and shaped circles or movements. Be particular and make them perfect each time.



REMEMBER YOUR OUTSIDE REIN

Hubertus reminds all of his riders not to forget to turn using the outside rein as well as the inside. "Lots of riders will just pull the inside rein to turn the horse and then they lose the straightness and the shoulder. The horse just ends up falling out through the shoulder and becomes disconnected through the exercise," Hubertus cautions. "Always remember the outside rein to turn - don't just pull on the inside, use your outside to turn and take the shoulder with you."

Keep the neck bend if you like, he says, but don't forget to keep the horse straight through his body. "If you are thinking about pulling the inside rein, usually that means you

should be actually correcting and half halting off your outside rein and using your inside leg instead, to ensure you aren't going to lose your shoulder and have the horse falling out."

KEEP YOUR RHYTHM

"Always think about and take care of your rhythm. If the horse loses the rhythm, you can tap him with the whip, if you like, to remind him to keep going on his own, but be careful not to chase him out of it. If you put your leg on and nothing happens, then give the horse a little click and send him forward off your leg or from a tap of the whip," he explains. "The horse needs to learn to go by himself and to maintain rhythm and speed. A horse that is truly in front of your leg will go on his own; you won't need to kick him

along every stride - that is what you are aiming for in your training."

TACKLING THE HALF PASS

A common problem riders have in the half pass is losing the shoulder through the movement. "Always remember the outside rein - even though you might be bending one way, it is the outside rein that will help bring the rest of the shoulder and body in line with the bend."

If you lose the outside rein, all that will happen is that the horse will continue bending on a straight line and not move over on the diagonal line required for the half pass movement.

"When he wants to run sideways, you stop that with the outside rein, not the inside rein," Hubertus tells Christine.

Top tip:

Take your time in the half pass.

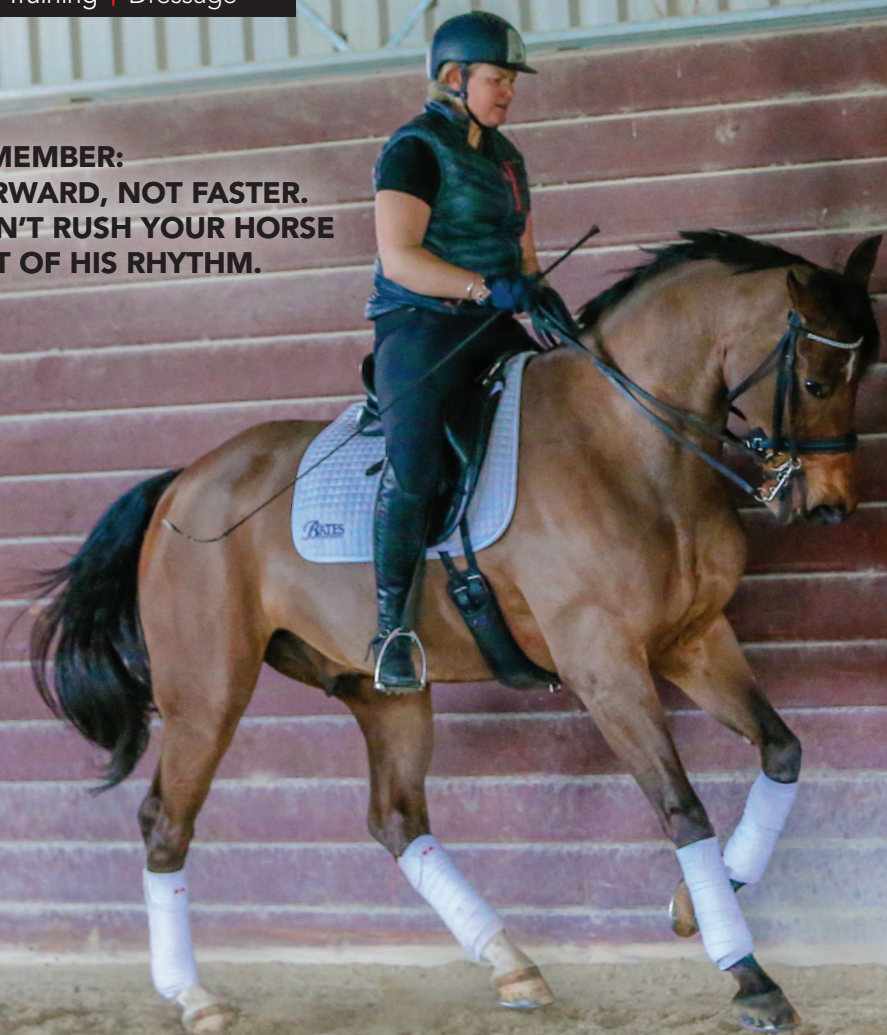


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FORWARD, NOT FASTER.
DON'T RUSH YOUR HORSE
OUT OF HIS RHYTHM.**



FLYING CHANGES

When riding a half pass line or even a diagonal, Hubertus encourages riders to set up and wait for the flying change.

"It is very easy to just change the bend over and the horse learns to do the flying change that way, but that isn't correct and it's not going to make for a very good change. Don't be afraid to use some counter flexion and then make sure the horse changes when you ask him to, not just because he feels like it," Hubertus warns. "Test your horse using flexions and counter flexions. If he gets a little stuck, don't be afraid to take a little curb to correct him in that moment."

Top tip:

It is okay to give him a little tap with the whip if he isn't reacting enough off your leg. Be strict with that moment.



THE VERDICT

Christine says:

I felt that the lesson went really well; we are very lucky to have such a good trainer in New Zealand. Riding with Hubertus was the first time I have done a lot of sitting trot and felt comfortable enough to lean back, due to a back injury. The aim for the lesson was getting myself back on track, having someone pushing me again and getting some direction with moving forward and developing the horse. Diego hasn't been as together as I would like since being in Europe, because I have been getting back riding again, so it was really about getting him more connected. It felt really cool in my lesson, as he has so many different gears. I just have to find them and make them even better as we grow together! As we got him more connected and then loosened him a little, all the movements just seemed to happen and I could feel the power, but he felt loose at the same time.

Diego hasn't been to any shows so the lesson was the first time away being schooled and he was so good! From here, it is really just about getting him going out and learning what it's all about this year. He is a horse that will really shine in the higher level movements, but New Zealand is a lot different to Europe so it's about getting him settled at the shows first. ■



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