

Thanks to a scholarship from the Anne Boyce Grant, I was able to attend the USDF National Convention and Symposium with Kyra Kurklund in Denver, Colorado from December 3-7, 2008. I arrived on Thursday and was able to watch the different educational sessions that were offered. All of these had an emphasis on rider and horse fitness and wellbeing. There were workshops on rider exercises, as well as horse exercises. The overall theme of the clinic and symposium was rider fitness. You stay fit to ride, you do not ride to stay fit.

The first educational session was titled 'Exercises to Improve Riding.' These speakers talked about using the Eckhart Meyners Six Point Structure to help improve riding. They gave the audience different stretches and self-massages to help improve flexibility. To prove their point, they had the audience turn their heads from one side to another, keeping their shoulders square in front of them. You were supposed to pick a focal point at the end of your flexibility. Then, they gave us several different stretches or massages and we then did the exercise again to see how our flexibility improved with these basic exercises.

The creators of Equi-Stretch made the next presentation. They gave a hands-on workshop of stretches and exercises that help balance the asymmetrical rider. Their presentation consisted of stretches.

The next presentation was by a sports-physiologist. She talked about how to work with your nerves before a competition. She strongly suggested a routine to warm up and get ready for competition. This should not change, and in the fast paced show environment, this should be what holds you together. You know what exercises you're going to work on in the warm-up ring, you know what you're going to do once you enter the show ring and are riding around the outside. These calm your nerves, because they can prove that you're in control.

Dr. Hilary Clayton and Narelle Stubbs gave the final presentations. One presentation was open for the youth members only. They gave a fantastic presentation talking about cross training. What other sports and exercises can help you become a better rider. They pushed rider fitness- that this was not a sport that you could keep fit by just riding. You need to do something else along with riding to be an effective rider.

They also stressed that we spend a lot of time warming up the horse, but we rarely pause to think about what we're doing for ourselves.

The second presentation that Dr. Clayton and Ms. Stubbs gave was on being an 'Effective' Rider. Dr. Clayton talked about the problems and issues that come up with the horse. Ms. Stubbs then translated what Dr. Clayton said for humans. They have done many studies with pressure sensitive pads between the horse and saddle to see what the riders are actually doing. They also brought out "Bluey" which was a peanut shaped exercise ball. One of the benefits of using this ball is that it has longitudinal stability, but the rider can tip from side to side, much the same as a horse. This ball, if used, can help the rider's balance and it also shows how the rider can affect the horse.

The symposium by Kyra Kurklund followed the same themes of all of the USDF University presentations. She strongly stressed the rider fitness along with seat and position. None of the riders, by her request, were very top level that only had problems keeping the flying changes straight or enough impulsion through a pirouette. The riders were all good, but had some seat and position and rider biomechanical problems. They were good examples of what issues the general population of riders face. Kyra worked with each rider over the two days to make huge changes. Several riders had problems sitting the trot. She told most of them to "make friends with the bounce." This did not mean bounce more, but to be elastic enough in your body to absorb the bounce, not tense muscles and resist the bounce.

Thanks again to SLO-CDS and the Anne Boyce Scholarship to allow me to attend this clinic and symposium. It was a great opportunity and gave me some great tools.