

Riding with Marina Genn

Building the Brain to Body Connection

International competitor-trainer-clinician, Marina Genn “packed the house” for a three-day clinic at Trilogy Farm and Training in Monroe, Washington, recently. As 30 auditors and 14 riders per day rode, listened, and learned from the former colleague of Dr. Reiner Klimke, the principles of good riding and “quality equine husbandry” shone through. (Trilogy Farm and Training is owned by Shauna and Greg Pinneo, whose hospitality included new landscaping, an impeccable setting, and free car-washing by Greg and his friends for clinic participants and auditors!).

Clinic organizer Cheri Ellstrom, who organized the first Seattle-area Marina Genn clinic in November 2003 at Haute Ecole in Issaquah, said the growing interest in, and enthusiasm for, Marina’s teachings was evident in the tripling of the size of the auditors at the recent clinic – held April 30 through May 2 – and the long waiting list of riders seeking to participate in the next regional clinic.

“Our purpose in bringing Marina to the Pacific Northwest is simple,” Ellstrom said. “We want to make available to the Northwest riders – and their horses – ongoing, international caliber, world-class training and quality instruction relating to *all* areas of equine husbandry.”

Genn concurs, adding that her clinics emphasize the skills trainers need to “reach” *their* students – who have a range of learning styles: “Our focus is helping our riders make the brain-body connection, and to give trainers the knowledge to instruct in a way their students can understand.”

Fundamental to riding with Marina Genn is the quickly understood fact that the rider’s position is of vital, functional importance. “Establishing a solid position in the rider,” Genn emphasizes over and over during the three-day clinic, “will allow students to control themselves first. This in turn, enables the student to correctly influence the horse and achieve the ultimate goal: to improve the horse.”

Clinic participants and auditors alike talk with enthusiasm about the incredible changes that quickly take place in the horse/rider teams as Marina Genn guides them through position and balance changes. Even very slight correction prove to “free up” gaits and increase stride and relaxation. One trainer, attending the clinic to watch her student’s ride,

remarked that she had “never seen the horse go this well.”

Another theme that Genn emphasizes is the need to help the horse move forward into the bridle, which holds true even for a green, fast-moving horse. For example, one rider on a young, tense, and hot Friesian, who found herself dealing with a churning, slightly too-fast trot, hears Marina Genn say: “The way you slow her down is not with your hands...If she gives you 180 miles per hour, you ask for 181; that way she’ll reach forward and relax.” She does this; the Friesian mare relaxes and moves with fluid and even strides that cause a few ooh’s and aaah’s in the audience.

Genn’s advice (heard in many ways throughout the clinic) works; “hand-riding” and “backward hands” are replaced by hands that are “forward and down” and “down and forward” – advice that works for the Grand Prix horse as well as the Training Level horses in the clinic.

With education and equine husbandry her focus, Genn clinics feature not only riding sessions, but further explanation for the participants by providing them with theory lectures in which Marina addresses the technical and psychological aspects relating to the rides of the day. “Trust yourself,” she says to one rider during a moment requiring her to give bold direction toward her horse. “Just do what you just understood – if it goes wrong, it is my responsibility!” That, we riders and auditors realize, is the Marina Genn style of teaching and working with horses and riders.

At the recent clinic, guest speaker Andy Dibbern, DVM, of Northwest Equine Podiatry, joined Marina in addressing the crowd by defining the importance of a properly balanced and shod foot and its correlation to gait development and soundness in the dressage horse. Having participated in the clinic himself, Andy interjects, “Marina’s scope of thought is sobering...It is such an awakening for most riders to understand how much their riding style affects soundness. Marina opens a lot of people’s eyes to that realization – and that is such a gift! She has made it clear to all of us why so many people struggle every day to keep certain horses going – enlisting every veterinarian/shoing advantage available – yet never suspect the riding. What an opportunity to take that

knowledge and use it to create a better environment for the horse to work in.”

In addition to offering clinics in Seattle, Portland, and Michigan, Genn is in the midst of developing her international training center in Leesburg, Virginia, in the fall of 2004. This facility is designed – in part – as a place for trainers to further their education by attending short or long term “training intensives.” It will also help propagate the teaching standards Marina Genn has established in her clinics and for which she is internationally recognized.

Having trained and competed in Germany in not only dressage, but in eventing and jumping as well for over 15 years, Marina Genn started her riding career in 1967 before moving her training establishment to Canada at the end of 1982. For 20 years, she rode 15 or more horses each day; in addition she imported and trained some 1,100 horses from Germany – many of them to International caliber competitive levels (35 of these to Grand Prix using only a snaffle bit as her training tool.) In addition to “classical” riding, she offers practical experience and take-away advice that works. In addition, her training in psychology furthers her ability to identify learning styles so as to best help identify with her students.

Ellstrom concludes: “Coordinating for a clinician such as Marina, who can magically connect with her audience and help the rider connect with her horse is both an honor and a privilege,” pointing out that the success of the clinic was evident not just among riders and the obviously relaxed horses, but among the auditors, whose experience was summed up by Nichole Walters of Cadbury Farm in Snohomish, Washington: “I’ve had the wonderful opportunity to ride with Marina in two other clinics, but unfortunately had to sit this one out...Luckily, I was able to audit the clinic and still walk away with great information and tools,” Walters says, “I love the fact that I can watch Marina teach and come away with improved teaching tools and focus to take back to my students. She really has a gift when it comes to teaching riders of all levels. There is a real artistry to how she is able to explain biomechanics in such detail, involve classical principles, and deliver the information with such finesse that makes the auditor feel as if they were riding the horse as well.” Walters continues, “Her energy level and passion to pass on

her knowledge to all who will listen is unsurpassed by any other clinician I have ever witnessed.”

In addition to seeing first-hand the obvious improvement in the way of going and relaxation of the horses in the clinic – all who displayed immediate improvement in their performance and gaits – clinic volunteers believe the goal of gathering many people together in the pursuit of promoting the education and well-being of both local equestrians and their equine partners was more than realized. Future clinics will encompass riders of all disciplines, creating opportunities for a variety of cross-training activities, which Marina Genn believes to be important in the development of the dressage horse as well.

Cara Anthony, owner and trainer at Potcreek Meadow Farm in Redmond, Washington, will host the upcoming June, 2004 clinic with Marina. Her beautiful hunter-jumper farm will accommodate a wide variety of riders and their horses. Anthony offers her own observations on the Marina Genn clinics: “What I especially appreciate about these Genn clinics is the camaraderie of the equestrians involved. It’s refreshing to see so many local trainers and students drawing together to learn from this remarkable woman. You do not accomplish what Marina has without an incredible amount of intelligence and discipline.”

For more information on Marina Genn, please visit www.aesva.com. For information regarding the June clinic at Pot Creek Meadow Farm, please contact Cheri Ellstrom at (206) 501-9039.

Jeanne McKnight resides in Mercer Island, Washington, and rode her First Level Appy-Arab horse, Molokai, in the recent Marina Genn Clinic.

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