

# Natural Riding

## Chiron in the UK!

**Chiron in the United Kingdom**  
**August 2003 with Peter Speckmaier**  
by Erica Lynall, CSHS/SHP

**M**y good friend Dorothy Marks and I set off for our Chiron seminar with great excitement—and, on my part, slight nerves. The reason for my slight nerves was that I had taken Nif, Dorothy's 15hh bright bay 17 year old Arab, to a Chiron jumping seminar. This horse was scared of poles, never mind jumping actual fences! The Universe obviously decided that this was a better test than taking my own mare who (now) loves jumping...I decided I'd better seize the challenge!

Nif is a gorgeous horse (aren't they all?) who has an air of a very old soul about him. I always get the impression that if he was human, he'd be out by day doing some gentleman's sporting activity that wasn't too dangerous, and by night would wear a velvet smoking jacket, drink port and stare at his priceless works of art. He would need company all the time, but would prefer if you didn't fuss too much over him. However, over the months that I have (been privileged) to ride Nif, I have noticed that there is a hidden child-like bounciness to him that comes out during outings. No anthropomorphism intended, of course!

The Chiron seminar was organized by Jane Kempton, CSHS/SHP, and held near Winchester where she keeps her horses. It was really refreshing to go to a "party" where everyone was Strasser trimming, and not to be the odd one out. The first morning was theory based, and Peter did a great job with his English, which is a relatively new language for him. The theory part is in the same format as the Strasser Seminars, due to Peter having designed them. It was informative and easy to follow for everyone.

After lunch we rode and did the first exercises, having split into 2 small groups. The first exercise was trotting poles, which most of us were fine with. The only horse that had a problem with them was an ex-racehorse who wanted to run away after poles and jumps. Peter and his rider had their work cut out to persuade him not to, and some progress was made, but it was only the start of a learning curve for him.

Nif had been worried as to where his buddy Echo was, so I had moved him around the jumping area, trotting and cantering a lot, keeping his brain occupied before the poles were begun. Movement always calms horses down, as all us Strasser people know. First, as directed by Peter, we walked over the poles, while I stroked Nif's neck, telling him he was good. I kept very calm



**Erica Lynall regaining her confidence on Nif, an Arabian owned by Dorothy Marks.**

internally. Eventually, we walked into the poles and trotted out. After that, we went down them at a very bouncy, almost passage trot. Nif seemed to be enjoying himself and had no problem with the poles, which I was relieved about. Dorothy, his owner, said that in the past (when shod) he wouldn't have gone within 20 feet of them.

Next we did the "alley," walking, trotting and cantering through the alley of poles with wings at the



**Dorothy Marks on her Andalusian/Thoroughbred cross, Echo.**

end. Peter laid a pole across the end of the alley after he saw all were ok with it, and Nif leapt it, followed by an arab head toss (this is fun!). After a few more goes, the pole was swapped for a small cavalletti, and this proved no problem, although Nif jumped it rather enthusiastically! He gave all the fences A LOT of room.

At the end of the session, both of us were really pleased with ourselves—in fact all the horses looked very happy. During the session, Peter had reminded us that we must praise our horses enthusiastically and mean it! "Praise your horse" and "praise yourself" were often heard throughout the 3 days. One very important aspect of Chiron is allowing the horse freedom to work stuff out for himself, then praising physically and with tidbits, so the horses learn by positive reinforcement. Actually, this encourages learning, rather than

negative reinforcement, which is something else altogether.

Day 2 dawned after a night of camping out in the horsebox (truck). I sat and watched the first group, and for some reason I started to feel apprehensive. I rode Nif through the "alley" and over the small cavalletti with no problem, but then we went on to jump a bounce fence of cavalletti, and I had an attack of nerves. I had the weirdest flashback to falling off over a fence when I was younger, and all my fear flooded back in a big rush. Nif had jumped really big and I felt too weak to stay with him. It didn't help that I hadn't slept well the night before. Peter spoke to me quietly and I regained my composure.

The picture (above left) was taken after this, with me regaining my confidence so my position is a little wobbly, and for Chiron style, my hips need to be further back towards the cantle and lower leg more underneath me for stability. This is such a classic thing to happen during a learning curve though! As you learn a new skill (and we both were) you go through a phase of letting go of the old way while the new way isn't fixed yet, so you feel rubbish. A lot of people go through this when they first read *A Lifetime of Soundness*! I managed the bounce fence in the end, but was glad of a rest afterwards. Everyone else did well and it was becoming clear to everyone that Dorothy had a real superstar jumper in her horse Echo. An expression of 'wow' was heard from Peter most times after they jumped!

On day 3 we did more bounce fences, progressing to a double, and went on to jump some bigger fences. Well, Dorothy and Echo jumped about 3'6" with zero effort on Echo's part, once he got over the fact that there was a scary red and white plank in the middle of it! Nif was absolutely raring to go on day 3, and so was I. Obviously the latent learning that behaviorists talk about had taken place overnight, i.e. the lessons had sunk in. Nif actually started to take me to the fences with big rhythmic strides instead of backing off ever so slightly like he (and I) had done the day before. We eventually jumped 2 cavalletti stacked up to make a decent sized fence and he actually jumped this one better than the small ones. He jumped most fences like they were 2-3 times bigger, and, in fact, Peter joked with me that first it was 5 times bigger, then 4 times, then 3 times, so we were heading in the right direction!

After this, Peter nonchalantly walked towards Dorothy and took Echo's bridle off (we all had neck straps). Apparently, Alison's Revitt's face at this point was a picture! After persuading the slightly bemused Echo to move away from his friends sans bridle, they were off. Its actually rela-

tively easy to steer without a bridle, you just need forward momentum and intention. Peter likens it to a boat in the water, which is impossible to turn without movement. In fact everyone jumped BETTER without the bridles (even though none of us used a bit anyway)!

Nif was a superstar at this point and jumped his best. So much so, that he jumped out of shot of all the cameras! We were all laughing, with spirits very high, including the horses. Peter emphasized that having fun is the best medicine/therapy for horses, never mind us!

Next, we went to a steep bank to practice going up and down hill in a forward seat. Dorothy and I knew about riding downhill in a forward seat, but we had never gone as far forward as this before,



**Jane Kempton on Puzzle.**

but it works and frees the horse to use himself to negotiate the hill. Finally, we went to a large stubble field and were instructed to go FAST AT THE GALLOP FOR FUN! Our horses need no encouragement to do this, and neither do we. What a great way to finish! It was serious oats all round for all the horses that night.

After each day, we sat down and watched a video of the sessions, which really helped the learning process, and had us laughing at ourselves as well. The whole thing is designed towards learning with the emphasis on having as much fun as possible—humans and horses. I would highly recommend Chiron to anyone involved with horses.

Dorothy and I reflected on Nif's achievements. Several years ago Dorothy realized that Nif had had problems with a tight saddle in the past that had hurt him jumping, but even with a better sad-



**Alison Revitt on Ricay (who is bridleless), owned by Jane Kempton.**

dle, they had never really got to grips with jumping. Back then, she didn't think about feet. It was obvious now that the removal of heel pain helped him jump in comfort, and with confidence as well.

He's not the sort of horse to land on 5cm high bars (ouch) and put up with it! In fact all the horses did really well, and it was obvious that their "Strasser" feet had helped them. One horse had been given away as hopelessly lame, and one or two would have been considered geriatrics by "conventional standards." Stiffness did not appear to be a problem for them once they got moving.

I, for one, really needed to brush up on jumping skills. I am now putting into practice everything I learned from the Chiron seminar with my own mare, Moose. When shod, she became frightened of jumping, and would either over jump, run out or stop 10 feet from the fence and refuse to move. Not anymore! The only thing that shocks me now about how she jumps is how CALMLY and cleanly she does it. Thank you Dr. Strasser and thank you Peter Speckmaier!

For more information on Chiron, read: *The Centaur Reborn* by Peter Speckmaier & Sabine Kells (available from The Horse's Hoof). 🌿



**Erica and Nif negotiating the hill in a forward seat.**

**About the author:** Erica Lynall is a CSHS/SHP (graduated 2002) who lives in Bath, England. She has been involved with horses for 26 years, becoming a part time instructor of riding & horsemanship in 1990, while devoting her spare time to studying behaviour & movement in horses. She has been on the holistic healing path since 1996, after developing Chronic Fatigue. Now

fully recovered, she works almost full time as a CSHS, as well as being a partner in a Bed & Breakfast. In early 2000, her mare Moose suffered laminitis, causing the discovery of the Strasser method. Moose is also enjoying full health in a small herd of Strasser-trimmed horses just outside Bath. Contact her at mail@ericallynall.co.uk



## OWNERS WANT HEALTH CARE CHOICES FOR THEIR ANIMALS

Tallahassee—With thousands of Floridians seeking alternative health care and wellness options for themselves, such as massage and acupuncture, those that are animal owners want the same kind of services for their treasured animals.

The Florida Alliance for Animal Owners Rights, Inc. (FAAOR), established in July, 2003, is seeking to change laws, rules and policies in Florida in a manner that would allow:

- animal owners to legally seek alternative health care and wellness therapies from non-veterinarians;
- encourage veterinarians to provide animal owners with more options in health care for their animals; and
- allow knowledgeable persons who wish to offer alternative health care and wellness therapies and counseling for animals to do so legally in Florida.

Today, any non-veterinarian who administers any treatment to an animal for the prevention, cure or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease may be found guilty of a third-degree felony. Also, any non-veterinarian who makes a determination of the health, fitness or soundness of an animal may be found guilty of a third-degree felony. The trigger is a complaint filed against the individual by anyone.

FAAOR is drafting legislation for 2004 to allow owners to have legal choices of alternative animal health care therapies and therapists, without becoming criminals or having the therapy providers become criminals.—Nancy Stephens

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## FLORIDA ALLIANCE FOR ANIMAL OWNERS RIGHTS

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