

Natural Skills

Chiron Riding

by Lynn Spaan, CSHS

On May 18,19,20 at Miel Bernstein's (CSHS) beautiful organic farm and equestrian center in Agassiz, BC, Peter Speckmaier from Germany held a Chiron Natural Riding Clinic. Peter is a Certified Strasser Hoofcare Specialist, and one of only a few certified worldwide to teach this riding method developed by Rolf Becher.

Peter taught himself English in only three months before coming to Canada, but we had no problems at all understanding him. He has a dynamic personality, and his love for teaching riders to have a better relationship with their horses is strong.

The Chiron method teaches the horses to become independent thinkers and be able to approach and jump difficult obstacles safely without the interference from the rider. The result is a happy, safe horse who loves to jump and jumps courses efficiently with minimal aids from the rider.

I took the clinic on my big Holsteiner/Clyde gelding who was (in conventional training) an "incurable bolter." I was a little apprehensive in the beginning due to the fact that Marco had been known to charge and crash through the obstacles he was faced with. This caused me to become timid at jumping and I was worried that the jumps would be too big. I voiced this to Peter and he said to me, "I teach only fun jumping - no stress, no stress." He also told me not to worry about Marco bolting, since a horse that is happy in the mind will not even require a bridle to jump a course.



First Alley: teaching the horse independence. Once the horse is in the alley, all aids (except those keeping rhythm going) are off and the horse learns to approach a jump and go over it. First it's done at a walk, in the forward seat, then later at a trot and canter.

Each day of the clinic started off with theory about the horse's anatomy, psychology and nervous system. The last half of each day was riding and learning the Forward Seat. This position allows the riders to remain in a solid, secure seat while allowing the horses total freedom to move. Small jumps were set up in such a manner that the horses learn never to "run out" from a jump. The riders approach each jump in the forward seat and let the horses have total freedom of their head and neck. Of primary importance to the approaches was the rhythm. Often Peter would be heard coaching a



Afternoon of day 3, where those who wanted had a chance to jump the course, and then jump it again without a headstall. What a distance to cover in just one seminar!

rider in an approach, "More Rhythm!" and "No Rhythm, No Fun!"

Two of the riders were very new to jumping and were riding the jumps like they had been doing it for years. One of these riders was Lillian, who works at Zen Equine. We found out at the end of the clinic that she had never even jumped before, and she was on a horse she had never even ridden! We were all amazed at how easy this style is to learn and how good it is for boosting rider and horse confidence.

We all had a fabulous time and all learned how fun and safe jumping can be when the horse feels comfortable. On the last day, Peter set up a course of six or seven jumps. Peter told me he felt Marco was ready to do it without a bridle and asked me if I felt I was ready for it. Well, if he thought Marco was ready for it, then I was too! I was having so much fun, I wanted to jump bigger and bigger jumps. So off we went with only a stirrup leather around Marco's neck for steering. Marco was magic! His ears were forward and looking for the next jumps. The course was winding and had some tight corners which he collected himself for and handled beautifully (it felt like he was sitting to do canter pirouettes!) - then he threw in all the appropriate flying lead changes to boot! I was truly amazed at how easy he was to ride, and how much enjoyment he had jumping. Everyone was cheering as we finished the course and slid to a stop at the treat bucket for Marco's apple/carrot reward.

A truly great time was had by all. We can't wait until next year for Peter's return to teach us again. 🐾

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Peter Speckmaier of Germany was the first ever Certified Strasser Hoofcare Specialist in the world, and is one of the co-instructors of the Strasser Course in Germany. He is one of only a few certified world-wide to teach the Chiron Riding method developed by Rolf Becher. Sabine Kells is working on a book about Chiron Riding with Peter, which will include riding methods, horsemanship, tack fit, nutrition and the whole nine yards on how to get optimal performance with your horse. Current plans are to have the book finished by August, 2002.

TUFTS (cont. from page 1)

Dr. Hiltrud Strasser presented her theories, and Dr. Carl Kirker-Head, of Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine served as moderator for the discussions. The panelists included Dr. Judith Shoemaker, DVM, a practitioner in complementary veterinary medicine; Dr. Tia Nelson, DVM, both a farrier and veterinarian who developed her own barefoot techniques; Craig Trnka, President of the American Farrier's Association; Mike Wildenstein, AWCF, CJF, Farrier for Cornell University; Henry Heymering, CJF, RMF, President of the Guild of Professional Farriers, and Pete Ramey, a barefoot practitioner promoting Jaime Jackson's methods.

Audience members (estimated around 65+) included Dr. Robert Cook, Gene Ovnicek, Fran Jurga (Hoofcare & Lameness Journal), Randi Peters (Natural Horse Magazine), K.C. La Pierre, and CSHS Todd Merrell, Lisa Walker and Ray Shammus. The audience was allowed to write down questions to ask, but was not allowed to participate in the discussions.

Dr. Strasser began with a presentation of her method and theories, similar to the lecture portion of one of her hoofcare seminars. She was also able to demonstrate her trim on the first day on one live horse's hoof, but due to time constraints, was not able to finish the rest of the feet (they were later finished by Todd Merrell, CSHS). This live trim that Dr. Strasser performed seemed to be well received by the conference participants.

Everyone agrees that Dr. Carl Kirker-Head did an outstanding job as moderator for the discussions that followed. There was definitely much to debate and disagree about, but there was also a tremendous amount of common ground. All the panelists agreed unanimously with Dr. Strasser's lifestyle recommendations—except for soaking of the hooves, which they unanimously disagreed with.

Some of the discussion topics included toe angles, heel height, and the ground parallel coffin bone (all panelists disagreed with the concept of a ground parallel coffin bone), function of the bare hoof and perspectives on shoeing. Most of the panelists were supportive of keeping horses barefoot, if possible. On the second day, the subjects of navicular and laminitis were covered, with discussion of the role of the navicular bone, blood flow into the hoof, treatment of navicular, and such treatments as grooving of the hoof capsule and cutting of the digital flexor tendon. There seemed to be a tremendous amount of information squeezed into a very brief time!

The conference wrapped up with three CSHS discussing their own success and experiences, and a discussion of the apparent success of the Strasser method among barefoot endurance riders, including world class rider Darolyn Butler-Dial. All the panelists agreed that Dr. Strasser's credibility would be enhanced if she could support her methods with classical research and data analysis.

This was Dr. Strasser's very first invitation to speak in front of colleagues—anywhere in the world—and she thanked everyone for this opportunity. As a grand finale, she received a standing ovation from the audience and panelists. 🐾