

Contact and Connection to Develop Throughness was the focus of the clinic and symposium, sponsored by The Dressage Foundation and Grand Valley Dressage Society. 11 auditors and 9 riders were given horse and rider information sheets so they could see what each rider was wanting to improve in contact and connection with their horses. It helped them follow along with the instruction each horse and rider pair received.

To demonstrate how contact changes as a horse develops, Emily did two demonstration rides on two horses at different levels of training. She spoke as she rode about what she was trying to accomplish with the exercises she did with the two horses.

The first ride was on a 4-year old mustang mare, Zyana. The mare's owner, Paige Burnham, had been riding Zyana for about a year and felt the mare was just starting to understand contact. She wanted Emily to demonstrate and teach her the correct way to ride a young horse to develop contact and connection appropriate for her level of training.

To begin the demonstration, Emily worked Zyana from the ground to see if she could get the mare to yield the inside hind under the body and step under herself. Once she was on the horse she asked for the same thing, wanting the inside hind leg to step away from leg pressure on the same side. She didn't want the horse to ignore the aid or fall into the aid.

She said in the beginning, riding a horse you teach them to follow the rein and if you touch the right rein they follow to the right, but after they understand that concept then you have to teach them that the inside rein is just for flexion to the right, but turning comes from the outside aids.

The mare wanted to fall in to the right when the right rein was touch, so Emily used a turn on the forehand in motion, doing this in the walk until the mare was



EMILY WORKING IN HAND WITH PAIGE BURNHAM'S MUSTANG MARE, ZYANA. THE GROUND WORK WAS TO ESTABLISH THE MARE UNDERSTOOD MOVING THE INSIDE HIND LEG UNDERNEATH HERSELF BEFORE BEING RIDDEN.

stepping under herself, and then took it into the trot. When the mare started to fall in to the right in the trot, she would walk until she got the mare coming under again with the right hind. Then she went back into the trot and as long as the mare stayed bending, and not falling into her right leg, she stayed in the trot. If the mare fell right Emily would go back to the walk and do a turn on the forehand in motion until Zyana was stepping under herself again and then went back into the trot. She also used her weight as an aid during this stage. Helping the mare balance in a turn to the right she would keep her weight a little left to help her not want to fall to the right.

Emily's second demonstration ride was on a 9-year old mare, Believe WS owned



EMILY RIDES JUDI DEVORE'S HANOVARIAN MARE, BELIEVE WS, AND FOCUSES ON ALIGNMENT IN THE TROT ASSURING THE MARE IS PUSHING FROM BEHIND AND THROUGH HER BODY TO THE OUTSIDE REIN.

by Judi DeVore. This mare is working at third level and so the focus for her connection was to be sure she was responsive off the leg.. During her warm up she worked in a rising trot but had the mare doing shoulder-in, haunches in, leg yields throughout the warm up to test for connection and throughness during these movements. She asks the questions in the warm up phase of the ride in a way that is less pressure, but tests to see if there are sticky spots that need to be addressed later in the work. Asking the questions early also helps the horse warm up correctly.

The other interesting thing about the way Emily works is that the work is interspersed with multiple walk

breaks. She said this is something she learned from Linda Zang, who will do a movement with a horse and then walk to process how it felt and what could be improved. Sometimes if the bend isn't correct or the horse isn't moving off the leg well enough this can be corrected in the walk and then the movement can be retried in the original gait. It saves on the wear and tear of the horse doing the movement over and over in trot or canter.

Emily also identified the mare wanted to avoid pushing from behind by sliding her haunches left or right. She used trot half-pass in the rising trot and counter canter to help her with straightness in the gait. Emily also used half steps asking for push out of the half steps while at the same time focusing on rhythm and straightness to keep her honest in taking weight behind.

Other pearls from the two days of teaching horses:

- Even in walk breaks make sure the horse stays marching and swinging through their whole body.
- Keep the horse's outside ear aligned with the outside shoulder to keep from overbending and losing the shoulder
- The leg may need to remind but don't let the horse ignore it. If it is applied you must receive a prompt reaction.
- Leg yield into the outside rein but don't overflex. If you lose the shoulder do leg yield into shoulder fore.
- Keep inside leg down and forward and upper body stretched up
- Avoid wide and low hands as they push the shoulder down.
- If horse loses shoulder to the outside, use weight to the outside and then the outside leg to push into the outside rein
- If the horse gets too low in front, think activity in the hind leg
- If you feel like crossing your hand over the neck, do a leg yield on that side.
- When cantering on a circle think of your inside hip making a smaller circle than the outside hip



**AUDITORS WATCHING AT THE
EMILY DONALDSON CLINIC.**

On Saturday, we had a lecture and potluck, where we went more in depth on the connection concepts such as focusing on turning from the outside aids. This lecture allowed members from as far away as Wyoming to listen and participate in the discussion.

**TDF and Grand Valley
Dressage Sponsored
Clinic & Symposium**

**Emily Donaldson:
Contact and
Connection to
Develop Throughness**

April 9th and 10th, 2022

To view the lecture and the two demonstration rides, click on this link: [https://
www.gvds.org/emily-donaldson](https://www.gvds.org/emily-donaldson)

**KAREN HARKIN AND
HOSANNA-UPPER LEFT**

**JULIE BURT AND FREYA-
UPPER RIGHT**

**KRISTA NOBILO AND SIR
EDWARD WS-LOWER LEFT**

**MEGAN BRETEY AND
IHILANI- LOWER RIGHT**

