

## Riding with Colonel Carde in Spring 2016

by Niina Kirjorinne

We enjoyed our first 2016 Finnish dressage clinic with Colonel Carde at Vihti Dressage Center in Southern Finland. This public clinic was held in very summer-like conditions in the middle of May. I had once again possibility to loan this familiar Lusitano gelding Quinto, as my own horse is still not back in business since his accident. I could only ride the horse once before the clinic, as we do have 450 kilometers between us - that unfortunately makes everyday practicing a bit challenging. This kind of setup might not work with every horse, but this one is very well-known to me from past years and once you get in the saddle it always feels you actually sat there just yesterday.

### Relaxation, Suppleness, Activity



On this clinic we went properly through common everyday exercises, focusing on increased relaxation, suppleness and activity. We were seeking even higher level of fine adjustment, that right feeling and calmness. On the first day Quinto was still a bit tense and on his turbo mood, and I was concentrating very much to help him find a more calm and relaxed way to work as he is very easily doing more than needed and becomes easily tense on the first day in a new place. When circumstances were calm and beneficial, we worked even a bit with collection. It works already better, on the first clinics Quinto got a bit anxious about having Colonel walking calmly next to him, maybe because of some old

memories from his past. On these clinics everything is done very progressively and in total calmness, so Quinto started quickly trust us and now he even let Colonel to touch the croup gently with the whip without getting so concerned. It is great to follow how Colonel seeks the right level of asking and working with each horse, keeping the horse confident and below the point where they get tense and still the movement is improved all the time. If something makes the horse worried or tense, even a little bit, the exercise is immediately made easier, nothing is done by force. I wish this kind of respectful way to work would be seen more often and widely on clinics and home training, in Finland and abroad. The whole idea is to make the horse to work willingly and in a way the horse himself understands what is wanted from him. And of course always with light, soft contact, constantly changing the frame, speed, gait and direction. In total understanding, rewarding the horse very often.

### **Flying Changes**



One of our topics on this clinic were flying changes and how to correct one of the most common problems. This horse has a tendency to get tense just before the change and sometimes he is changing late from behind. We started correcting this issue by seeking the best possible preparation and balance of the canter before the change. The preparation was done on a large circle in true canter, changing the lateral flexion to counter side, bending the horse towards counter shoulder-in and took the change to counter canter from there. If the horse was in a hurry, we took first counter lateral flexion

in true canter, then walk, then counter canter, changing the flexion and then walk and canter again. With this preparation we got some very nice flying changes.

In Finland you can usually see an exercise like this done the other way, and you can also find that in Kyra Kyrklunds book. There you change from counter canter to true canter first on a circle, flexion towards new canter before the change is not allowed as it is said to make the changes small or impure. There really is many ways to do things. This exercise we did is rarely seen here and it's not very well known way for many riders at least here. I still think it is one very good way to solve many problems among other good exercises, using this I was able to help my own horse make better flying changes.

### **The Rider's Hands**



On these clinics you always see riders move their hands. You use the hand forward, upwards, sideways and sometimes even downwards but never backwards. Also in lateral movements raising outside rein is used to improve balance for that moment, it can be used upwards or upwards-forward towards the opposite ear, depending how you want to help the horse just that moment. The contact must be soft, light and permanent, moving hands does not mean the hand is pulling, restless or uncomfortable for the horse. It's the direction of the rein that also helps to give the horse an idea of better balance, frame and carriage of head, neck and body, of course with help of the other aids and balance of the rider.

## Lateral Movements



We practiced different lateral movements focusing on activity and correct flexion. Colonel Carde is very precise about quality of the flexion, it must be correct and coming from the poll, not further behind on the neck. The horse must not be in hurry, but there must be activity. Always when you slow down, you put the activity on. One very common exercise is shoulder-in on diagonal, from where you can change to half-pass or do half-pass and take the shoulder in from there. Lateral movements are done smoothly varying them on different straight and curved lines, listening to the horse and its body - how much can you ask today? Movements are not repeated endlessly, the quality of the movement and correct feeling are more important than endless repetition. You also give the horse short rest periods constantly, every now and then between a couple of minutes and also when changing the rein.

This clinic was simply awesome. I feel very privileged for having been able to train on

these high quality clinics both with my own horse and also with other interesting horses here in Finland and in Europe. This variation educates enormously my gut feeling. One of the most valuable parts of these clinics are absolutely the state of mind you find to your own riding, which then keeps living on your own riding at home. Those exercises we do on clinics work also as peaceful solutions when facing trouble at home, they encourage you to keep going and practicing in a positive, respectful way.

Now I just keep waiting for the next possible opportunity, these clinics are very valuable experiences.

I'd also like to thank the organizers, and give my special thanks to the person who loaned this great horse to me. It's a real honour to ride for Colonel Carde.