

Vicky's View

By Dr Victoria Hamilton

Victoria Hamilton is one of Australia's top dressage riders. Victoria has trained and competed throughout Australia and overseas. She has won numerous State and National Championships, two Australian World Challenge Finals (with Arditto in 1998 and Asaachen in 2000), two Australian Dressage Leaderboard Titles (with Asaachen in 1998 and Kaduso in 2002) and was the runner-up in the World Final of the PSI/FEI World Dressage Challenge in Germany in 2001. Victoria always states this as being her competition career highlight. She regularly tours the country conducting clinics and is experienced coaching riders of all ages, abilities and ambitions. Victoria was the W.A. State Young Rider Dressage Coach in 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2005 and in 2006 founded WADYRA (WA Dressage Young Rider Association) where she is currently the chief coach.



Back (in) to work

By the time you are reading this article I will have been busy helping people bring their horses back into work. During my special start-up sessions I assess horses from all disciplines and develop individual programs for the riders to follow for each horse. It is a great way to ensure any little problems that either developed during the horse's time off or perhaps didn't subside with their rest can be addressed early and that attention is paid to suppleness as well as strength and fitness.

I always begin by assessing the horse's body condition, legs for any abnormalities and muscles for asymmetry, tone and pain. Then I lunge them with no side reins and no gadgets of any kind. This is so I can see his/her natural way of going. I am interested in the regularity of the paces and observing the horse's preferred head carriage. I also watch and take note of the lateral stiffness or suppleness and the ease the horse can transition between the various paces. I explain to the riders how what they are seeing their horse do on the lunge is what they will do when they start them under saddle and how this knowledge can really help us plan the best exercises to practise.

Lateral suppleness and responsiveness is also checked in hand. It is not quite as simple as just being able to move the shoulders and hind quarters around both ways although this is a good starting point! Watch for any changes to the horse's balance when you are doing this and listen to the purity of the footfalls. Landing heavier on one leg may indicate a loss of balance or a shortened stride. Sometimes this is easily addressed by altering the degree of

neck lateral flexion or encouraging the horse to take more weight behind but sometimes it is a sign that the horse requires some muscle work or special unmounted stretches. Note if the horse is happy and able to abduct and adduct each leg equally or does he only cross really well one way because he is reluctant to move the opposite leg out of the way as much?

If your horse has had much time off and has changed significantly in his or her body condition be aware that your saddle may not fit properly. Some horses put on weight and then the saddles can be too tight in the gullets. Others lose top-line so the saddles may sit too low or close to their spine or are no longer balanced. If you or your instructor has the knowledge it may be possible to use pads until your horse is back in shape but more often than not you should organise a saddle fit with a specialist.

When recommencing riding after a spell take time to really feel your horse's natural paces and take note of his enthusiasm for work. Remember that correct training will develop and enhance the paces, never destroy them or make them less beautiful. Any irregularity, no matter how slight, is a sign something is wrong with your training or physically with your horse.

Have the balance of your horse high on your list of priorities. Is stretching down really the best if your horse is going on his forehead? Perhaps stretching in not too low an outline is more beneficial.

Make the most of this time to work on your position. Are you in balance? Are you laterally supple? Work with your coach on some exercises to help you to become more aware of your position and to improve it.

Cross train as much as possible by incorporating pole work, hill work and in-hand work regularly. Obviously be aware of any prior leg issues your horse may have had and avoid certain surfaces or activities known to aggravate them. Above all make it fun for you and your horse. Remember they don't ask to be ridden and we are privileged that they allow us to do so.

Just because your horse remembers how to do all the fancy tricks that you did before he had time off doesn't mean you should start doing them straight away. Think how long it took to build him up to being able to do them in the first place and give him time once again to reach that level of muscle tone. You may have a long season ahead of you and what you do now will determine if your horse will see you through to the end. Take time and your horse will thank you for it.

Continuing last month's theme of making dressage more accessible and popular, WADYRA (WA Dressage Young Rider Association) is offering two

fantastic new scholarships for riders aged 9-13 years of age. I am very excited about this and can't wait until the selection day on February 20th. WADYRA has always had great innovative ways of helping our young riders. In the past the club has awarded members scholarships to help them on their paths to becoming dressage judges and coaches. Well known judge, Alex Devenish-Krauth previously won a judging scholarship which provided funding to begin her dressage judge training and Hanna Thompson received funding for beginning her coaching career.

The successful recipients of the 2016 scholarships will have ridden and in-hand lessons with me, learn test riding skills using a variety of learning techniques and have a wide assortment of lectures and demonstrations. By becoming totally immersed in dressage in a really fun environment and seeing it from all different angles as well as having fantastic role models not a lot older than themselves, these riders will blossom as previous riders have done before them. Some of the State's and in fact even Australia's most successful dressage

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young riders have been members of WADYRA for many years such as Stephanie Munro, Rebecca Radney and Madison Tristram who at only 16 has just won the Aachen Challenge which is a derby style event for riders up to 25 years of age.

WADYRA meets 8 times a year on Saturdays and is a club for riders up to 25 years of age. The dates are roughly once a month from March to November but are not a set day of the month to avoid clashes with major dressage events. At each rally the riders have a lesson with me as well as ride training tests. Sometimes the tests are marked in the usual fashion by an accredited judge with the opportunity to repeat certain movements or even the whole test again straight away to get instant feedback. Other times the tests are videoed and the judges or I go through these tests with the riders watching so they can really see what is happening. Another great exercise is when the riders have to judge their own test on video and then compare their marks with the marks given by the judge. This is such a super learning exercise as some riders realise their test was not as bad as they felt whereas others gain an understanding of the necessity to pay attention to detail and where each movement starts and finishes.

In addition at WADYRA there are lectures, demonstrations and games, not only at the rallies but also at their camps. Normally there is just one camp held at the SEC in July but due to its popularity another is being held in April this year as a lead up to the Interschool competition. What a fantastic preparation this will be!

More information about the WADYRA scholarship selection day is available on the WADYRA website www.wadyra.org as well as general information about joining the club. There is also a facebook page so be sure to like this to receive updates on other initiatives made by the club throughout the year. For the 2016 scholarship, riders do not have to already be highly competitive riders. The club is all about training and developing our young riders so being willing and able to learn is more important in this instance than already successful in competitions. The selection day will be run along similar lines to a normal rally so I will have the opportunity to work in a lesson situation with the applicants. So for any riders in this age group interested in learning how to correctly train your horse on the flat for whatever discipline you like and to improve your dressage test riding - apply now! Best of luck! It's going to be a great year!



Well known judge, Alex Devenish-Krauth, previously won a judging scholarship which provided funding to begin her dressage judge training.

West Australian Dressage Young Riders Association is an exciting dressage club, designed specifically for riders up to the age of 25 who are interested in learning how to correctly train your horse on the flat for whatever discipline you are interested in and also improve your dressage test riding.



Our coach is Dr Victoria Hamilton BSc. BVMS (Hons), NCAS 1.

This year we are also offering a 2 day camp leading up to Interschools in April plus the exciting news of 2 scholarships for young riders aged between 9-13 years. We have 8 rallies per year which are held on a Saturday once a month and we have a 3 day camp at the SEC held each year in July.

- Our rally days format is as follows:
- Individually tailored program to suit the rider and their horse
 - A ridden test with an EA judge
 - A lecture

To become a member now please visit our website <http://www.wadyra.org/> or contact Nicky Munro on Nicky@researchsolutions.com.au or 0411 600 074. Don't forget to

like us on Facebook to keep up with all our latest events and share your experiences with like minded people.

WADYRA