



e-Centaur

A ROCKY MOUNTAIN DRESSAGE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Junior Camp

Many of you are beginning to talk about your summer plans. Please include the RMDS Junior Camp which is going to be June 19-22 at Tomora Training Center.

[Click for flyer](#)

Region 5 Youth & Adult Team Competition

This event provides an opportunity for youth and adults to compete in a team-like atmosphere, and encourages camaraderie and support for youth and adults competing at any level.

[Click for flyer](#)

EHV-1 Tracker Map

This is a great resource for staying up to date on the EHV-1 outbreak. If it affects any RMDS events, we will keep you updated on [Facebook](#).

[Click for Tracker Map](#)

USEF Helmet Rule Change April 1

RMDS would like to remind all members of USEF's new helmet rule. All competitors at USEF shows must wear helmets after the rule goes into effect on April 1.

[Click for more info](#)

Members

View and print your membership card.

Not a member yet? Join now.

[Click for Membership](#)

Calendar

See the upcoming USEF/RMDS Show Schedule, clinics, schooling shows and events.

[Click for Calendar](#)

Chapters

Latest Chapter news coming in May. RMDS has 12 chapters in the Rocky Mountain Region. If you would like to change your chapter affiliation you must personally notify the central office in [writing](#).

[Click for Chapters](#)

Scholarships

RMDS awards scholarships annually. Read about 2013 winners C.C. Ross and Kristi Wysocki in May Centaur.

[Click for Scholarships](#)

USDF Region 5

For the latest updates and current Region 5 news.

[Click for Region 5](#)

Advertise with us

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Facebook

RMDS and many of our chapters are on Facebook, like our page to keep up with us.

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May Centaur

Clinic Recap: Several Articles & Photos on George Williams' The Training Scale

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Board Fun Facts

And More . . .

Centaur Really is Your Newsletter

Some of the best articles in Centaur are suggested by you. Both articles below came in unsolicited from members who asked if their experiences would benefit their fellow riders. What do you think?

Wait, there is another information-filled member-generated article coming in the May Centaur. Watch for Amy Jablonovsky's Story Behind the Trophy about the champagne bucket she donated to present annually to a top competitor at the RMDS awards banquet each November. We invite you to tell your story behind your trophy, too. Who does it honor? Why did you give it to RMDS to be awarded? Is the trophy a special memento? Who are the folks behind this gift? Why did you choose the category for the award? A photo is welcome with a present or past winner, horse, trophy or donor. Join other RMDS writers by submitting your article on this topic or any others. Article deadlines are the 7th of every month. Let me know how I can help.

Centaur Editor [Linda Gaber](#)

Condolences to Family and Friends of Boulder Valley's Patti Taylor

By Sandy Hotz

I had the pleasure of knowing Patti Taylor for more than nine years, starting when she first came to me for training with her quarter horse, Stony.

As a rider, Patti always had an uncanny intelligence and thoughtfulness; therefore, she progressed quickly. She took her lessons very seriously, practicing the concepts on her own until the next week, when she would tell me what she had "figured out," and we would add some new things "into the soup."



Patti Taylor and Lulu at Boulder Valley Dressage's So-Long to Summer Show in September 2012.

I remember countless sessions where we discussed theory and concepts, and she would add them to what she already knew. It was such a joy working with Patti: Her intelligence, focus, and utter devotion to improving her partnership with her horse was often the highlight of a long teaching day.

She would never blame the horse, and would use the horse's reactions to gauge her progress. As a person, Patti was kind, loving, calm, funny, realistic, compassionate, stubborn, articulate, and above all, forgiving.

She had a wonderful, dry sense of humor, and could poke fun at herself. Her laugh was real, the kind which comes from the heart. She was positive and hopeful, yet utterly realistic. She never panicked, and usually was the first person who put things into perspective when others were creating drama. Even when she encountered the seemingly countless hurdles in the last few years of her life, she remained steadfast, taking one day at a time, never complaining or asking, "Why me?"

I have learned so much from Patti, and her sage-like qualities have impacted my life greatly. Patti Taylor, dear friend to me and to many, has left us much, much too soon.

A student also of Jessica Greer, she passed away on March 20 from cancer. She was active in her BVD chapter on committees, as a horse show volunteer, horse show mom and with local 4-H club programs.

Contributions in Patti's memory are being accepted to benefit the Cloverleaf Riders 4-H Club. To donate, send a check made out to Cloverleaf Riders 4-H Club to Kate Turner, 5022 Perry St., Denver, CO 80212.

CSDA's Backus Mother and Daughter Honored For Helmet Safety, Sportsmanship, Riding

Congratulations to the mother/daughter equestrian team of Laura and Madeline Backus, who have been awarded numerous honors recently.

Madeline, 16, has earned the scores needed for her United States Dressage Federation Bronze Medal to be awarded in 2013. With her accomplishments in dressage and eventing, this one is very rewarding and she now has her sights set on her Silver Medal. She represented Area IX at the 2011 Adequan FEI North American Junior and Young Rider Championships and finished 9th overall. She also received the 2012 Charles Groesbeck Sportsmanship Award presented at the Spring Gulch Horse Trials.



Madeline Backus

Laura also was awarded two honors. She won international recognition by [Riders4Helmets](#) as a winner of the Craig Ferrell, M.D. Equestrian Safety Award. Other winners are Alison Springer (USA/eventing), Isabell Werth (Germany/dressage), Lucinda Green (UK/eventing) and Meg Wade (Australia/endurance). This award recognizes individuals who are exceptional role models for helmet wearing and equestrian safety in general. She also received the United States Pony Club's 20+ Year Local Legend Award for giving 20 years or more of valued service as a volunteer dedicated to developing horsemanship, sportsmanship and leadership among Pony Club members.

Laura has her USDF Bronze and Silver medals, was the 2009 American Riding Instructors Association National Instructor of the Year (she is ARIA Level III-certified in dressage and eventing) and is an H-A level graduate of The United States Pony Club.



Laura Backus

Laura is the eventing instructor and co-owner with her mother, Leslie, of Pendragon Stud Equestrian Center, near Larkspur where Madeline trains. She and Madeline are members of the Colorado Springs Dressage Association.

Schoolmaster Helps Move Rider Farther, Faster

By Susan DeSylvia, M.A., High Plains Chapter

I'll never have another horse like Born Free. Then again, I won't need one.

Having a schoolmaster to learn from is a gift, but it has a significant price tag. My friend Jackie Gladu, a mobile equine massage practitioner from Grand Junction (she is a 2010 RMDS First Level Champion), shared a Facebook comic post that went something like this: "Adult amateurs don't need \$40,000 horses. They can do it with a \$1,000 horse . . . and \$39,000-worth of lessons and training."

I had to laugh because, even with all my lessons and instruction, I had struggled for six years to understand foundational dressage concepts with a fancy young horse from Ireland that I had bought to do three-day eventing. And, yes, Jackie, I had spent close to \$40,000 in lessons, shoes, vet fees, boarding, feed and horse purchase over six years. While my scopey horse was able to excel and move up the levels in x-country and stadium, we were not making the progress I wanted with my dressage goals. This article shares some of the reasons why I made the decision to spend about the same amount of money at one time on a dressage schoolmaster who could be a far better partner in my dressage journey.

My non-dressage riding friends didn't understand my reasons behind buying a "new" imported Danish warmblood that was 14-years old-- the same age as the old horse I had at home. Born Free took me from a First Level rider to the FEI ring at PSG - in only three show seasons. Soon, I was able to teach my former event horse to work over his back and accept a steady connection on the bit because it was now solid in my mind and body. I then trained him to do shoulder in, haunches in, half pass and flying changes. That was the power of having a schoolmaster. If you aren't able to buy a schoolmaster, try to lease one or sit on one any chance you can.



Susan DeSylvia hugs Bo after their 2012 RMDS 4th Level A/A championship and her fourth Silver Medal score.

photo credit: Kathleen Bryan photo

In this and upcoming articles, I will share more about the benefits and care of a schoolmaster:

- * What is a Schoolmaster?
- * Why Should You Consider Finding One?
- * How Do You Find One?
- * Colic Surgery, Ulcer Care and Maintenance
- * Out-of-State Travel and Training Tips
- * Marketing and Advertising Your Schoolmaster (or Any Horse) to Sell

Here is the place to start. Riders need to know what a schoolmaster is and why they should consider finding one to ride. What makes a horse a great schoolmaster is, in large part, his disposition. Super trained horses do not guarantee super schoolmasters. Some professionally trained horses can get frustrated and uptight if a less-experienced adult amateur takes the ride. There is so much we communicate in our bodies through our seat, lower back, breath, elbows, wrists, fingers, knees, thighs and calves. If not done clearly, these messages cannot produce progress, or even a good gait.

A schoolmaster is an older horse who has "been there, done that" and, usually, is much less spooky at home. He is a forgiving, patient, tolerant well-trained horse. That's a rare, special horse. For example, learning to half pass was difficult for me. My schoolmaster would feel my attempts at changes in my body position and, even through my tension and struggle, he would start the movement. As my aides became clearer in my body, our half pass improved. In more time, I was able to regulate and correct half passes mid-stride.

A schoolmaster by no means is a "cure-all" for dressage. He is not going to do all the work for you. To help Born Free help me, I took personal training with Georgia Burleson at Nizoni Center for Pilates & Health in Elizabeth. With only one session a week, I couldn't believe how much I was improving my body awareness and strengthening my core. I rode five days a week to keep my horse fit, watched videos online and signed up to ride or audit every clinic I could. My schoolmaster helped me learn, but I still had to be prepared as much as I could to ride him.

Price Ranges for Purchase

Now, let's talk money. The level and amount of a schoolmaster's training, age, soundness and show record all factor into its price. In my experience, to buy an X-rayed and veterinarian-checked, sound 12-year-old FEI schoolmaster imported from Europe could cost up to six figures. Some 15-year-old FEI schoolmasters have sold for \$50,000. You could save money by considering a schoolmaster of a breed other than a warmblood, or a horse that was not great at horse shows, but is solid in his training at home. For an older, lower-pedigree (18+ year-old FEI) schoolmaster in the US, or a slightly younger Second to Third-Level FEI schoolmaster, prices can be \$15,000 to \$25,000. Several things are guaranteed: A good schoolmaster is hard to find, many people want them, and if you find yours, be prepared to act quickly to put a deposit on him and set up a trip to ride him.

Why Buy a Schoolmaster?

The answer to the schoolmaster purchase question is: Do you hunger to take a quantum leap in your riding and understanding of dressage? I was an event rider and had just made a big step forward in my flatwork by switching to dressage lessons with Gwen Ka'awaloa (current RMDS vice president.) Gwen gave me an amazing opportunity to ride her Safarie - who she imported from Holland as a 3-year-old and trained to Grand Prix. At the time, he was trained to Fourth Level. She thought it would be helpful for me to feel "a real dressage horse." Oh, my, was it ever eye-opening. Riding a horse that was used to a consistent soft steady contact taught me that my habit of putting my hands forward wasn't rewarding him. Actually, that was never giving him a steady connection. When I put my hands forward on Safarie, he thought I was asking him to go into that contact or extended trot. I think I got 50 lessons of understanding in that one ride. Riding a well-trained horse is instant feedback on your mistakes and misconceptions.

I can tell you the place and time I went from a perspective of dressage as just the necessarily evil of three-day eventing to "Wow, I really want to learn how to have that kind of connection with my horse." Ah-ha came while I was videotaping at Freedom Farms at Debbie Wilke's Uwe Steiner clinic. After filming and listening to Uwe's instruction to ride the horse with every stride - telling students the aids needed for movements stride by stride, step by step: "Turn your shoulders to the inside and your outside leg stays behind the girth." I thought, "I just might be able to finally learn dressage this way."

After I filmed a few more Uwe Steiner clinics for clients, I asked Deb if she could put me in the first time slot at his next clinic because I didn't want anyone to see my inability to sit the trot and that I wasn't "a real dressage rider." In fact, I didn't even have a dressage saddle any more. I had just decided Prelim eventing wasn't a safe hobby for me and I had sold most of my eventing tack. My first lessons with Uwe were in my jumping saddle. But, after hearing Uwe teach me how to connect my horse from the rear to the front, how to understand half halt with "think to the halt", I felt the change in my horse's way of going, how he came up over his back, how his gaits floated. It was a drug that once was in my system, I wanted more. But, back home, there I was just working on 20-meter circles in walk-trot-canter. I wanted to learn dressage by riding a horse that knew dressage.

These experiences motivated me to hunt for a knowledgeable dressage horse. I wish I had done this so much sooner. Just as I knew I wasn't cut out to home school my son because I'm not comfortable learning his material at the same time I'm trying to teach him, I now realize that trying to learn dressage at the same time I was trying to teach my horse was just not going to work for me. I am just so glad I bought an FEI schoolmaster.

Next, I will describe how to find a schoolmaster, so you can, too. I'll provide suggestions and even a checklist for searching for horses for sale, setting up a test ride trip and bringing "a bad cop" to help you find your dream horse. The time to evaluate a horse is before you sign its papers. Let me remind you, though, of the important lesson I learned: It costs just as much in boarding, training, vet care, shoes and showing a horse that is a true dressage partner and that helps you learn, as a horse you are struggling with.

Contact me at Susan@ProHorseProductions.com to talk about this article, and if you are considering buying a schoolmaster and want to know more before the next article.

Susan DeSylvia is based in Parker and has a master's degree in industrial organizational psychology. Thanks to her partnership with Bo, she earned the United States Dressage Federation Bronze and Silver medals. For 12 years she has operated Pro Horse Productions www.ProHorseProductions.com video capture and editing services for same-day clinic DVDs, sale horse productions posted to YouTube, farm, stallion and production promotion, and unique video scrapbooks with editing raw video into shorter music video memories.