

Harmonizing with Your Horse

Olympic medalist Hilda Gurney offered up two full days of USDF Adult Clinics at Longwood Farm in Ocala, FL

By Summer Best

It's one thing to be an accomplished rider. It's another thing to hold merit as a great trainer. Yet those specialists who can ride, train and teach their craft—effectively sharing decades of hard-earned knowledge—just might be the rarest of all.

Olympian Hilda Gurney is of that unique caliber, and she recently shared her talents by accepting USDF's invitation to teach the Nutrena/USDF Region 3 Adult Clinic, hosted at Longwood Farm in an unusually chilly Ocala, FL, March 2-3.

"I don't really think about teaching because it's all I've ever done, all I've ever been," Gurney said. "I generally don't do that many clinics now be-

cause I'm full-time teaching and riding at home. But USDF asked me to do this clinic, and it was an honor to be asked, so I accepted."

Gurney, who taught elementary school and special education before turning full-time to her dressage career, lives in Moorpark, CA, where at the age of 69 she still rides fifteen horses a day and "guesstimates" that she executes 500 flying lead changes during those sessions.

"I work hard," Gurney said during a break at the Ocala clinic. "That's what I do." Then, in typical fashion, she deflected attention away from herself and back to her students and their horses.



LAP WARMER: A blanketed Corgi helps keep his owner toasty during the clinic

Clinic Features Quality and Quantity

"I think the quality of the horses was good," Gurney said at the clinic's end. "The horse care was very good. The riders were very receptive and showed a lot of growth and appreciation in their riding, even in one day's time. I think they all learned a lot, both riding and with the lecture last night."

The clinic was conducted in a symposium-style format. Each rider had a private 45-minute session on both days, and on Saturday evening Gurney led an evening lecture with dinner for the riders and auditors.

Eight horses and riders were chosen for the clinic, which was organized by the Deep South Dressage and Combined Training Association. DSDCTA president Barbara Petti said she was pleased with the event's participation level.

"I thought it was a very good turnout," Petti said. "We had 125 auditors attend on Saturday and 85 at the lecture. I think the whole clinic was a fantastic success. It's a financial loss for



SUMPTUOUS SETTING: The beautiful covered arena at Longwood Farm in Ocala was the venue for the 2013 Nutrena/USDF Region 3 Adult Clinic with Hilda Gurney

our GMO [USDF group-member organization), but our GMO generally does something for the region. Joe Watkins at Longwood Farm was kind enough to donate the use of the covered arena. On top of all that, we have a dedicated, great group of volunteers.”

Becoming a Centaur

Do you yearn to connect with your horse in a deeper and more meaningful way? Gurney has a plan for that.

“To make a dressage horse, you have to invest a lot of time,” Gurney said. “If I ever write a book, it’s going to be called *Centaur* because you have to become one with your horse. It takes tremendous time.”

Gurney continued that running theme of “time and effort” throughout the weekend, and it wasn’t lost on the riders.

Renee Genter, a nurse practitioner from Ocala, rode in the clinic with her sixteen-year-old Swedish Warmblood gelding, Tomson. By the second day, Genter said, she’d had a “lightbulb moment” as Gurney helped

her to develop an improved canter with better engagement.

“Today we were a lot more round and found a lot more self-carriage,” Genter said. “The biggest thing is that I have to learn to keep my elbows up more and supple him more with hand and wrist movement. Follow but not be so following. I really did have an ‘aha moment.’ It’s probably something I should have figured out before.

“She’s a great teacher,” Genter said of Gurney, “and it clicked today. I have never been to anything like this. We’re working at Second Level toward Third Level and changes. Right now I’m enjoying every level. I go to the barn and I forget about everything for about three hours every day.”

The dressage clinic was a new experience for one rider. With a background in eventing, Kelly Jennings, of Cocoa, FL, is now doing First Level dressage with her six-year-old American Warmblood mare, Lexington.

“I sent in a video about four days before the deadline, and I got in,” Jen-

About Hilda Gurney and the Adult Clinics

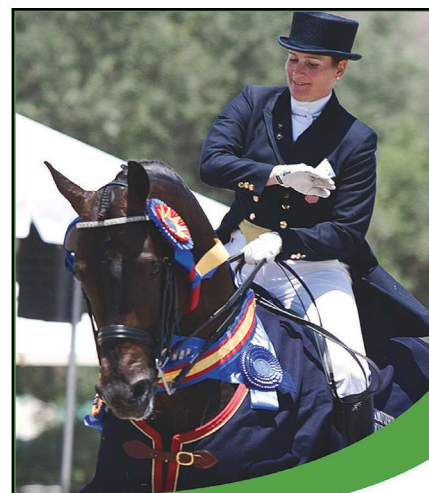
Hilda Gurney, a 2007 inductee into the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame and a founding member of the California Dressage Society, is an FEI 4* dressage judge and a USEF “R” dressage sport-horse breeding judge. Often referred to as a pioneer in the sport, she has had an enormous impact on US dressage over her decades of involvement. With her fellow Hall of Fame inductee, the legendary Thoroughbred Keen, she amassed a team Olympic bronze medal in 1976, an individual gold and silver and three team golds at the Pan American Games, and six US Equestrian Team National Grand Prix Championships.

The March Florida event was the first in Gurney’s 2013-2014 Nutrena/USDF Adult Clinic Series. Gurney will be presenting a symposium-style clinic in each USDF region. The clinics are open to adult riders, both amateur and professional, as well as to auditors of all ages.

For future clinic dates, rider applications, and auditor information, please visit usdf.org/education/clinics/adult.



THE MASTER: Hilda Gurney at Longwood Farm, site of the 2013 Region 3 Nutrena/USDF Adult Clinic

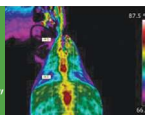


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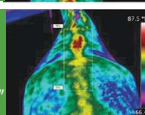


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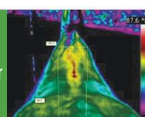
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“After 7 days wearing the Back on Track sheet, the patient shows significant reduction in inflammation over the wither base, low thoracic spine and complete resolution of sacral inflammation.”



Study performed by Joanna Robson DVM, CVSM, CVA, CSFT, CIT. In Spiritus Equine Inc., Napa, CA.

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TALENTED HORSE: *Gurney praised Maya Sniadecky's mount, Carib, and encouraged her to take plenty of time to develop him*

nings said. "She [Gurney] was really wonderful. She balances the positives with the reinforcement with negatives and the instruction. You don't walk away feeling belittled. You walk away with great information and inspiration to improve.

"She builds on everything from the first day to the second," Jennings continued. "And then with dinner and the presentation, she did a lot of reinforcement without pointing anyone out. She really did a nice job of getting

The Clinic Participants

Nora Batchelder, Williston, FL, riding Bahai
Susan Bender, Beech Island, SC, riding Rulette
Stephanie Bennett, Graceville, FL, riding Nabucco
Renee Genter, Ocala, FL, riding Tomson
Kelly Jennings, Cocoa, FL, riding Lexington
Mary O'Brien, Ponte Vedra, FL, riding Watch Me M
Maya Sniadecky, Citra, FL, riding Carib
Nancy Trivisonno, Sarasota, FL, riding Coeur de Lion.



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to know us and our horses; she really did a wonderful job of putting everything together.”

Jennings said she plans to continue honing her mare's First Level skills for the time being, maybe doing some eventing down the road.

“We know we're not strong enough for Second Level yet, but we'll start working on some Second Level this year and maybe we'll be closer by the year after. So we'll see.”

As an interesting side note, Jennings, who is an ultrasound technician by trade, recently published a novel, *Kick On*, based loosely on her adventures growing up around the horse industry in Panama.

“*Kick On* is an adventure/romance,” Jennings said. “It's got a lot of the humor that eventers bring to the dressage world. It's one of those things that almost started as a joke, and then I wrote a snippet and my friends liked it. So I wrote the book, and it practically wrote itself.”

Rider Maya Sniadecky, of Citra,

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FL, brought another perspective to the weekend, riding a six-year-old KWPN gelding named Carib, bred by Sandy Lieb at Pennock Point Sport Horses in nearby Reddick, FL.

"It was good to be here," Sniadecky said. "He [Carib] has the most awesome canter, and he's very forward. He comes out every day ready to work. He's just building the trot as he gets older."

Originally from Switzerland, Sniadecky works full-time as a trainer in the north-central Florida area.

"She [Gurney] was getting after my seat, and I know I need to work on that," she continued. "I work with a lot of young horses, but I need to keep sitting back, so it really helped to hear that again from someone else. I would definitely come back to a clinic like this."

Gurney praised Carib's talent during the sessions, noting his exuberant

personality and style.

"You need to really spend the time with this horse," Gurney told Sniadecky. "He's worth it. All the really good horses are hot horses, but you have to be careful because they tend to train us if we let them. You need to make him as much as you can more of the center of your life."

It's nice when a clinician seems as happy with the participants as they are with her.

"Terrific improvement, all of you, from just yesterday," Gurney said. ▲

Summer Best is a lifelong horse owner and equine journalist. She currently teaches ethics in journalism at the University of Florida College of Journalism & Communications and is completing a master's degree in mass communications.

Acknowledgments

The USDF is grateful to the sponsors, volunteers, and organizers who helped to make the 2013 Region 3 Nutrena/USDF Adult Clinic a success:

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