

My experience at the George Williams FEI Pony Clinic- June 30 to July 1

Hi, my name is Mackenzie Kurtz, my pony's name is Harry Houdini, and I'm going to tell you a little about my experience at the George Williams Clinic held at Gleneden Farm.

Tuesday, June 30th

Today was the first day of the clinic and I was way too excited! My pony Harry Houdini is stabled in Nescopeck Pennsylvania. So it's about four hours away from Bedford, New York. When I first received the schedule for the day, the first thing I said to my mom was "I want to be there at eight o'clock to watch Rachael Chowanec and her pony Sunny ride!" So, this meant that we had to leave our barn around 3:30 am. For anyone who's never been to Gleneden Farm, as soon as you pull in you can't help but ask yourself, "Why are some people so lucky to live here all the time?" It is an absolutely gorgeous facility!

Today I was the second to last rider, so I got to watch almost everyone ride before mine. I got a pretty good feel of how my lesson was going to go. Before I went in I knew that I wanted to get some help on my collection in the trot and canter. (I haven't been getting very good scores lately.) My pony is a perfect example of an overachiever! Harry always thinks he's going to be this good little pony that's going to do what you want before you ask for it and make you happy. Well that's not always the case. Usually what happens, for example, is that I ask him to go straight down the long side in the collected trot or canter. Simple, right? Yeah not so much! We usually take one straight step and Harry goes, "Okay well do you want, renvers? Travers? Half pass? Shoulder in?", and then when you tell him "No, just go straight"...he gets very nervous that you're going to punish him. Have you ever seen the Lippizaner stallions, and how they do the airs above the ground? Well when Harry gets nervous, that's pretty much what he does. It takes him about a minute to cool down after his little "episode" and get back to work. So, I kind of figured we would be doing this a lot during my lesson with George Williams, so I was prepared and wasn't going to be surprised if or when he did this.

To my amazement, Harry was perfectly fine during the lesson! We worked on getting him more up, bouncy. I'm not quite sure how to explain the feeling. We did a lot of bending both ways. George had me work on a 10 meter circle and collect Harry. We did this in the trot and canter. He said that my trot work was good, but my canter work still needed a little help. So we mostly worked on the canter. One thing I noticed was that whenever I bent him to the inside, making sure to never let him fall out the outside, he got better and better, and his canter seemed to improve a lot. After I was done with my lesson the first thing I said to my mom was "Wow, Harry's never felt that good before!" I couldn't wait for my lesson the next day!

That night we had a wonderful dinner with everyone involved with the clinic. Each of the riders there asked George Williams a question about something they wanted to know. It was very interesting to think about that he was in all of our places at one point in his life.

Wednesday, July 1st

Today I had my second lesson with George Williams. I thought that my lesson

yesterday was great; today's was even better! We still worked on a small circle. He said that you want the circle to feel like you could make it bigger at any time with just your inside leg. We worked a lot on transitions, canter to walk and walk to canter. Most of the time whenever I ask for a canter to walk, Harry either gets too on the forehand and completely stops, or decides not to listen at all and ignores me. George said that the more canter to walk transitions I do, the better they're going to get. He said also to make sure to set Harry up really well, before I ask for the upward and downward transitions. We did a lot of lateral work like shoulder in, renvers, travers, and he said that I was definitely ready for Third level, which is good!

One thing George told me that I thought was very interesting was "If he doesn't listen to your hands, go to the whip." George said that I use my half halts too noticeably and that I need to give smaller ones, with only my fingers. He also noticed that I always hold my right hand higher than my left. He told me that by doing this, I don't have a steady even feel on Harry's mouth.

I learned so much in this clinic, and I feel that I benefited from it greatly! I can't wait to go to my next dressage show. It should be interesting to see if and how my scores improve.

Everyone involved in putting on the Pony Clinic did an amazing job. Everyone was so nice, and I am so happy that I had the opportunity to be a part of it! I would like to thank The Lendon Gray Scholarship Committee for allowing me to be a part of this wonderful experience.

Thank you so much,
Mackenzie Kurtz

Photo on next page.

