

# Major Miguel Tavora Clinic Classical Riding Club

3rd, 4th and 5th November 2015

## **“Anything we can do to make the horse more comfortable, we do”**

The Master, Major Miguel Tavora, quietly sits in the corner, observing horse and rider warming up before him. Now and again he gives the odd, short, crisp instruction before returning to silence whilst he watches on. Calling the rider over, he discovers what he needs to know before sending them away again, this time he instructs them to work away from the wall to begin with, changing direction across the diagonals regularly. Why? Tavora explains that “it is very easy for the rider to become lazy when riding against the wall”. Quietly, he then makes his way into the centre of the school, where the work truly begins.

The second day of the clinic proved to be a real treat. We got to watch on as the Master lunged a 5 year old Thoroughbred, Charlie, before he was to be ridden. The overall aim of this lesson was to encourage the horse to begin to relax and work through his back. Side reins were positioned low, around the girth, before attaching them loosely to the bit. Tavora was clearly working with the concept of pressure and release. The pressure of the side reins were only applied when the horse was working incorrectly, in a hollow outline. Once Charlie had learned how to remove the pressure, through working in a better, more relaxed outline, he was able to remove the pressure for himself and the side reins slackened instantly. Charlie began to work more consistently, relaxing into a better, lengthened frame in the walk and take bigger walk steps. Transitioning to trot, Charlie displayed tension again. The Master was careful not to push the horse forward in the trot, ensuring the trot remained slow to encourage the horse to relax, again, to remove the influence of the side reins. With patience, Charlie began to settle and work through his back. Once satisfied that this 5 year old was beginning to use his body correctly, his rider was allowed to mount. Charlie was much more relaxed and willing through the remainder of the lesson. Tavora advised us that patience was needed, and that it was important to “relax the back, make it easier for him”.

A 6 year old Lusitano entered the school, also very tense and sharp. Unlike the Thoroughbred who hollowed himself, this boy had become over bent. “Let him have his neck”, advised the Master, “poll flexed, neck longer to stretch the top line. Soft. Pressure. Release”. He continued to advise the horse’s rider, “hands very down, a little more forward, fingers like silk. Everything very light”. Soon, the horse began to relax as he was encouraged to lengthen his neck. His movement became freer and a sense of calmness filled the air.

Throughout the day, we learn the importance of riding in “rising trot to refresh” the trot work. On a big circle, riders were asked to go more forward in to a medium trot whilst rising, then back to a more collected, sitting trot then forward again into rising trot “as this helps to improve the trot a little bit”. The audience also began to see what happened when the horse was allowed to rush down the long sides and how the rider needs to “avoid rushing the trot on the straight line... He will throw himself onto the forehand.” So what can we do if the horse begins to rush on a straight line? Try to rebalance through riding a circle or shoulder-in for instance. Make use of gymnastic exercises to help keep the horse supple. Aim to keep the rhythm, not allowing the horse to become stiff.

Julianne was riding her husband’s horse, Xix. The lesson began as the previous ones had before with Tavora quietly observing. “You are kicking him with the spur every single stride, allow your leg to be longer”. The Master asked for permission to ride her horse. Off Tavora and Xix went, working in silence, completely focussed on each other in deep conversation. Throughout, the Lusitano worked in a school walk and school trot to aid his balance. Meanwhile, his shoulders became freer, more elevated and the strides slower, with more expression and power. Tavora worked Xix through transitions, shoulder-in and haunches-in on a big circle, occasionally taking the horse large. The

movement became slower but more powerful, more elegant. Xix was becoming more responsive to the aids of the Master and as a result, had lifted in front and was now working from the hindquarters and through his back. It was wonderful to see the change and in a short time together. Both horse and rider were in harmony, there was no force just mutual understanding.

Tavora then explained, as he rewarded the horse a long rein, how the work was to help the horse to become more responsive to the leg. "Timing is key", he goes on to explain "if you're not able to drop your leg, you're not able to let the horse through and the connection is lost". What is important about a rider's position, is the ability to apply the aids with the right timing and in the right place, this will less disturb the horse's balance. It is most "important [to know] when to stop the aid. Stop when you got what you need".

The Master was strict, always insisting when discussing that the rider should stop to talk. It was polite to do so. He was quick to stop and correct the rider if an exercise wasn't being ridden correctly. He was quiet when he needed to be and spoke when he needed to, even if only a few words, it was enough to get his point across. He showed humour "have you lost something?" he asked, looking around on the floor near the combination as the rider was looking round at her horse's body, to check bend, "look through the ears!" Tavora also showed generosity, taking the time during his breaks and lunches to discuss questions anyone should have.

Overall, it was a very insightful clinic. Each rider was able to take something away with them, each one wearing a big smile as their lesson came to a close. Every horse was beautifully turned out. It was so refreshing to see an improvement in every horse and their way of going, with no force just calm work and relaxation. It was also a wonderful display of a variety of breeds, Thoroughbreds, Trakehners, Warmbloods and Lusitano's all confirming that Classical Dressage is for any horse when working with the correct gymnastic exercises for the individual horse. The clinic really highlighted to me the importance of people becoming more aware of their horse's natural abilities, for example, an Iberian is naturally more able to collect whereas a Warmblood will find this more difficult than they would to lengthen. It is being aware of this and adapting the work to the individual. The whole atmosphere was wonderful, Water Farm were so warm and welcoming, supplying us with delicious home cooked food for lunch to warm us up ready and energised for an afternoon of learning.

Thank you to Sylvia Loch and the Classical Riding Club for inviting Major Miguel Tavora to England for this rare opportunity of a much respected master to share his knowledge amongst riders and spectators alike.