

## “The Art of Riding starts with the Perfection of the Basics”

Early April saw another successful clinic with Nadine Francois from Portugal, who follows and continues the teachings of Portuguese Riding Master Nuno Oliveira. During her most recent clinic held outside Hamilton, she taught a variety of students and horses with different backgrounds and at various stages of their equestrian training.

Nadine usually starts her lessons by asking the rider some basic questions about themselves and their horse, followed by a few minutes of observing them in their routine. With her sharp observation skills, Nadine quickly detects some underlying issues, discrepancies or weaknesses by watching not only the horse's way of going, but the rider position and effectiveness of their aids.

She concentrates on adjusting the rider's position to the extent that their aids become more harmonized and thereby more effective, which in turn leads to a better balance in the horse.

In essence, this is the meaning of “aids”, meant to help and assist the horse to move more balanced and easier, rather than forcing the horse into a tense outline, or worse, hindering it to do what is asked of it.

A lot of the corrections that Nadine suggests deal with the use and position of the rider's body (pelvis, shoulders, head, elbows ie the “seat”), and its independence to the driving aids (done via the legs) and small adjustments done via the hands on the reins.

The horse is always the mirror: does it work in a better balance, is it better balanced through the shoulders, is it working over the back, is it tracking straight, is the length of the neck and the position of the head in good relation to the exercise and the level of education of the horse?

The rider's aids, have to be refined constantly, so ultimately the basics can be done with increased refinement and any adjustments needed in the horse's balance will be done by the rider almost automatically. Only once that has been achieved is the horse ready for more complicated work without taking damage to its body.

Nadine's ultimate goal is to educate the rider to an extent that they feel when their horses work in a better balance and can improve their horses balance without little instruction, thereby empowering the rider to think for themselves, enabling them to continue practicing at home.

The clinic was well received by all participants with the desire for more to come in the future.

Some participant feedback: (note: there will be a few photos with these)

*Jenny Magee comments: “Thankyou so much for organising the clinic with Nadine. So much learning and hard work! But so worth it. Nadine has an amazing eye and I loved her focus on improving the rider so that my horse went better. I have always struggled with my contact and my hands moving.*

*She helped me improve my contact so much and so many light bulbs went on. She told me what to do rather than what not to do! By stabilising my upper body (and core), improving my posture by having me vertical in the saddle were the first steps. Then showing me exactly how to keep my contact correctly my whole interaction with my horse changed. I had been 'giving away' my contact in transitions etc rather than 'giving'. Now our contact has become more established my horse is able to step more under, stay with me and come up through his wither. He is lighter and not always pushing on to the forehand. Having two lessons were amazing to set up my brain to know the new way and feel. The next ride when I got home was even better as it was now not so 'different'. Look forward to the next clinic!*

*Murray Riches: "I really valued the opportunity to join Nadine's clinic. Nadine has a sharp eye for detail, and clearly a wealth of knowledge of the art of training and developing a horse - looking forward to next time!"*

Scott McKenna: Nadine's eye for detail is second to none, during her most recent visit that was no exception, she always consistently identifies small basic errors I am making and the corrections make a lasting and fundamental improvement in my way of riding. It is always in the days and weeks after she has visited that I can really feel the improvement in my horses as a result of her training.