

BACH Year-End Event and Awards

Jan. 6, 2024

Mary Wicksten



If an outsider thinks about riding in Texas, the mind automatically goes to visions of “cow ponies” or rodeo broncs. Texas has a long history with horses going back to the Spanish explorers, early day ranchers and, of course, the Comanches. But horses are not native to North America. By the time that there was some interest in horseback competitions, the Europeans had been riding fine horses for more than a thousand years!

Much western riding differs from dressage in obvious ways: the saddles, one-hand versus two hand reins, training for cutting cattle, etc. But careful riders can learn from each other. Using the covered arena at “Look Sharp” farm, owned by Don and Marcetta Darensbourg, we had a close-up view of the riders.

Our demonstrators, Jennifer Skinner and Erica Hunter, showed us their tack and discussed how it was chosen. As in classical dressage riding, not everything fits every horse! Saddles must fit correctly; bits are of different lengths and may contain curved areas called “ports”. Rider Erica demonstrated while riding in a hackamore, quite unfamiliar to many of us. There was an exhibit of western versus dressage bridles, bits and hackamores for audience inspection.



Western riding is associated with quarter horses. Jennifer demonstrated how her quarter horse, Taz, could perform a calm walk but also transitions into the trot—not just a western “jog”. Western horses often are trained to go almost directly into a canter from a stop—a

useful skill while working cattle. New “western dressage” tests may include movements from classical dressage but also spins and other western elements.

Erica showed basic western riding atop her chestnut mustang “Merry”. Yes, a mustang! She has participated in competitions to train a horse “off the range” in a short time (the “Extreme Mustang Makeover”). In some competitions, the trainer can choose her own horse but Merry was her luck of the draw. Erica says that Merry is the sweetest horse she has ever worked with and she is looking forward to finishing her training and keeping her.



Donna Meyer mediated and helped direct the conversation. Donna is an accomplished rider, instructor and dressage judge and holds an “r” in classical dressage and an “R” in Western Dressage. She described some of the confusion in the beginning of Western Dressage for the judge. “How much contact should the rider have, what is the difference between and trot and a jog.

After the demonstration, the audience left the chilly outdoors for snacks in the Darensbourg’s home. Especially appreciated was a “horse cake”, red velvet cake with fluffy white icing. Winners of BACH’s annual awards got their prizes afterwards.



Many thanks to the organizers of this demonstration, our riders, and the Darensbourgs for use of their arena. I hope I’ve learned something useful to aid me in riding my half Arab “Soda”.



Sandy Venneman, Marcetta Darensbourg, Karin Loftin, Cynthia Werner, Jinny Johnson