

## The Thrill of a Lifetime

Hoping for a lesson on a nice horse, a surprised student lands herself a memorable session on a world-class retiree.

By Ellie Joos

After my son had finished with college and I had taken care of the last of the expenses, I happened upon dressage purely by accident. Under the guidance of a dedicated trainer, Cindy Canace, I have grown to love the sport. I've even had a few experiences that I feel are worth sharing.

Being somewhat uneducated about the horse market, I started my dressage career

with a Quarter Horse. He and I parted company after he realized that I was afraid of him. Then my sweetheart, Appletonia, a 14.3-hand Morgan Horse, entered my life and together we began our education. Of course, it was one of the worst combinations—green horse, green rider—but we have persevered and are making great

progress. At this point in my life, my goal is to have fun and perhaps make it to First or Second Level. I have become familiar with the names of the “heroes” in the dressage world through magazines, videotapes and Camp Happy Rock, the adult



While on a business trip, Ellie Joos took a memorable dressage lesson on Monsieur.

dressage camp that Cindy organized. In my capacity as a Camp Happy Rock volunteer, I have rubbed elbows with Betsy Steiner, Kathy Connelly and Kathy Adams, the camp's great teachers.

My business requires me to travel to California, and last year I discovered that Olympic bronze medalist Charlotte

Bredahl-Baker lives in one of the neighborhoods I frequent. On a whim, I called to see if I could schedule a lesson with her. I expected a return call from an assistant and was pleased when Charlotte herself phoned to arrange for the lesson.

She was wonderful. My lesson was on a First Level horse on the longe, and Charlotte did not make me feel foolish. In fact, she was very encouraging. On my most recent trip, I called again and was able to arrange another lesson. When I arrived at Charlotte's beautiful new facility, she was riding her Grand Prix partner Lugano. She pointed to a horse in a paddock and said to get him groomed and saddled. I walked over to this enormous horse and I thought that he must be kind because Charlotte would not have me ride him otherwise.

As I groomed him, I asked a helper if this was a nice horse, and he said yes. Because of a language difference, I knew that when I asked the horse's name, the man could not possibly have replied, “Monsieur.” Of course, I knew all about Monsieur and had recently read in *Dressage Today* that he was retiring after a

successful career with Charlotte.

When I entered the arena, Charlotte was taking Lugano out, and she said to warm up the horse I was riding. Another rider was leaving, and I asked her if my horse was nice, still feeling nervous with this giant creature. The woman assured me that my horse was great. I asked his name, and she replied, “Moose.”

“Moose?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied nonchalantly. “It's short for Monsieur.”

“Not *the* Monsieur?” I asked, somewhat dumbfounded.

“Yes, Charlotte's Olympic horse,” the woman replied.

I still get goose bumps when I think about it. Charlotte came into the arena, and I expressed my surprise at her choice of horse for me. She grinned and said, “I was going to tell you later. I wanted to surprise you.”

The next 45 minutes were pure exhilaration. After warming up with walk-trot transitions, we cantered, then cantered from the walk, something I do not yet do with my horse. In fact, the rest of the lesson was spent doing things I have not yet done, and did not think I would ever do.

Under Charlotte's direction and the wonderful Monsieur's magic, we passaged, did flying changes and collected canter. Charlotte said, “I bet you didn't think you'd do passage today.” I replied, “I never thought I'd do it in my lifetime!” I laughed out of pure joy, and I sensed that Charlotte enjoyed the same thrill that I was experiencing.

I cannot thank her enough for the gift she gave me that day in allowing me to ride her magnificent horse. As long as I live, I will remember her gracious generosity in giving me one of the greatest thrills of my life. 🐾