



# Transitions

Newsletter of the Dallas Dressage Club ☼ May 2012

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Dallas Dressage Club is a USDF GMO,  
and all members are automatically USDF  
Group Members.

For USDF Participating Membership,  
members must apply directly to USDF.

## From The Editor:

May is here and the DDC Spring Shows I and II are coming up quick. Good luck to all of the competitors. Pam Fowler-Grace is going to be teaching a clinic after the DDC club's Schooling Show in June. More information is available in this month's Transitions. Have a wonderful month! Pauline

### Dressage Training in Europe for the Amateur Rider by Janet Tornelli-Mitchell

As I am riding the train from Seville back to Madrid, I am looking out of the window enjoying the beautiful countryside and reflecting over the week I have just spent training at Epona Equestrian Center. The landscape is nothing like what I am used to in Texas. Vast rolling hills that seem to be covered in lime green velvet, nonstop groves of olive trees, beautiful Moorish-style castles on top of hills and yes incredibly graceful and beautiful horses. I feel an instant connection with Spain, a country who worships horses as the noblest of creatures. The sky parallels my mood: one moment the sun is shining vibrantly and cheerfully over the green hills as I can still feel the enthusiasm of having ridden flying changes on Habanero, a pure Spanish breed horse, that morning. The next moment, the clouds cover the sun and abolish its gleam as my heart breaks at having to leave Epona behind.

Not only was I riding flying changes for the first time ever, but I was learning how to do half pirouettes, half pass canters, piaffe, passage and the Spanish walk. Just one week prior, I was a First Level rider who only dreamed of such movements. As an avid Dressage enthusiast, I had read all about "classical Dressage" training and its beginnings, and had always thought it would be exciting to be able to train in Europe. So when it came time to decide how to celebrate my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, I decided this would be a great opportunity to go to Europe and train in Dressage! Epona Equestrian Center has been featured in several magazines including "Dressage Today" and "Horse and Rider", and after learning more about this center, I chose Epona as my destination- to train and to ride the beautiful Andalusian horses I had always dreamed of.

Epona is a training center approved by the British Horse Society that offers several different training programs. I decided to choose a program that would combine trail riding through the Andalusia region in Spain in the mornings and dressage lessons in the afternoon. Before long, I was flying to Madrid and taking their "fast train" to Seville. Once in Seville, Fernando Garcia, owner of Epona, picked me up from the station and drove me to where I would be spending the next week. Epona is just a few minutes from Seville and Carmona. The center consists of a beautiful Hacienda that is about 500 years old, and houses the Garcia family as well as the guests that are training at the center. Epona is made up of stables, two outdoor arenas, one indoor arena, a cafeteria and staff quarters. Fernando showed me to my very quaint room, which at one time had housed some of Napoleon's troops! After freshening up a bit and making sure I went around and met all the horses, Fernando took the group of us who would be spending the week training at Epona to Carmona for dinner. During dinner, Fernando wanted to discuss our individual goals and the plans for the week. I told Fernando that I simply wanted to improve my riding as much as possible, so he suggested I change from the initial program of trail riding and afternoon lessons I had signed up for to a more intense program which consisted of two riding lessons per day, and either a lunge lesson or a lesson in ground work every day. This sounded great to me, but I told him I also wanted to have the opportunity to take a trail ride in the beautiful countryside. The charming and enchanting Mr. Garcia told me not to fret, because he would find some time to take me on a trail ride. After a typical Andalusian dinner, we went to bed and got ready for a busy week.

The following morning we met with Catalina and Viviana Garcia to discuss our previous riding experience, our goals and any concerns we had. Caty and Vivi are extremely qualified instructors and trainers. I could never even attempt to list in this short article their accomplishments, so to do them justice I won't even try. Instead I'll say that if you are interested, you can go to their website and learn more about them at [www.eponaspain.com](http://www.eponaspain.com). I was somewhat anxious- I didn't know what they would think of my riding, and I was concerned about riding highly trained and sensitive schoolmasters which I had never ridden. When Caty asked me if I rode with a double bridle I could feel my stomach begin to knot up. I answered no, thinking I would be wasting her time. Enthusiastically Caty replied: "This will be a great opportunity for you to learn how to ride in a double bridle!" A few minutes later, I was mounted on a gorgeous Andalusian mare in a double bridle. Before long, I was learning how to do all of the upper level movements I had thought would have take years to learn. I had also heard of many of the same posture corrections my coach Virginia Norris is always working on. But by being able to ride such highly trained schoolmasters, it gave me the ability to really work on improving my skills. Being able to take so many lessons in such a short period of time gave me the ability to "get the correct feeling" and work on reproducing it over and over.

Besides all of the riding lessons, the Garcia Family had also made plans for us to go on some exciting "field trips." One day we were taken to the city of Jerez (site of the 2002 WEG-World Equestrian Games) to visit the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art to see a performance called "How Andalusian Horses Dance." It was nothing short of spectacular. We were also able to tour the grounds and see the training of many men and women who had come from all over the world to learn about Spanish horses and all of the disciplines of riding. Another night we went to the city of Seville to visit a beautiful (and very affordable) tack shop. We also got to see Flamenco Dancers and enjoy a wonderful dinner in the energetic atmosphere of Seville. While at Epona, guests can also chose to take singing lessons, guitar lessons or learn how to do the Flamenco dances.

Another highlight of my training vacation was Jane Garcia's meals. Except for the times we had dinner in Carmona and Seville, all other meals were provided for at Epona. Jane's Gazpacho (typical Spanish tomato based soup, served cold) is truly one of the best Gazpacho's I have ever had! She prepared all of our meals fresh every day with produce from local markets. Most of the dishes were typical Spanish dishes that were healthy and delicious, and served with an endless supply of local wines. I could easily get used to the Mediterranean lifestyle!

As my week was coming to an end, Caty and Vivi announced we were now ready for our riding lesson with Spanish Olympian Rafael Soto. Although I felt that in just a few days time my riding had seen some improvements, I told them that I did not think my riding was to the level where I needed to be wasting the time of this Olympic athlete. They chuckled and told me not to be so negative, so the next thing I knew, I was sitting nervously on top of my mount waiting for my class with Rafael to begin. Almost immediately, he was able to make me feel more relaxed and was very gracious, kind and encouraging. It was a great lesson, and afterwards he posed for pictures and autographed a book I had purchased on the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art, as he is now their technical director.

As I am approaching the train station in Madrid, I am elated and thankful that I was able to have this opportunity, and I plan to reunite every year with the other riders who I met there and became friends with. I would highly encourage anyone to take advantage of such an affordable program like this (more info at [www.eponaspain.com](http://www.eponaspain.com)). While I still have a lot to work on when I get home, it has really encouraged me and motivated me to know that those upper level movements are not as impossible as I thought they were!

