

Getting “Duttonized”

An Adult Amateur's Fairy Tale Week Comes True at the First Ever Phillip Dutton Eventing Academy.

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It was snowing hard in Maine last January when I looked outside my office window, mulling over summer eventing plans and what the next adventure would be for my horse Paxton and I. We came off an incredible high in 2007 winning three USEA National Year-End Awards at Training level, but the thought of going to my first Preliminary event in five months? Well, it hardly seemed possible after my morning hack, dodging falling limbs laden with snow and leaping into the four-foot snowbanks to avoid the plows which had struck our mailbox no less than 11 times.

FACING PAGE: Phillip watches Mary Jordan jump a corner aboard Paxton Abbey.

ABOVE: On the flat with Phillip: Mini Gammell of Maryland with her mare, Princess Buttercup.

Sifting through some papers, however, I found the flyer for the first Phillip Dutton Eventing Academy. I knew I saved it for a reason. I'm always interested in learning something new and with a raging case of cabin fever I contacted Evie Dutton and signed up immediately. Winter in my mind got a lot shorter; I had something to focus upon. I was all set.

So with the Olympic Games looming just a few weeks ahead for Phillip, why hold a camp in June for a bunch of amateurs?

"Bea Cassou first talked to me about doing a camp, and I thought it was a great idea," Phillip said. "I then talked to Karen O'Connor about theirs and met with Bea, Evie, and Karen Rubin (who organizes my clinics at home) and after brainstorming we all got excited about doing it and ran with it.

"Horsemanship is my number one priority," Phillip continued. "I wanted to convey that to the participants while they also learned to ride and train correctly. There are no gimmicks to good riding; it is a process that takes time. I wanted people to come away from this experience having confidence in themselves about their riding so they could look forward to challenges and improvement."

That, of course, sounded great to me, but heading south to Area II was uncharted territory; I didn't know anybody and I didn't know Phillip, other than that he had a reputation of being a brilliant rider and one who made his own horses (which appealed to me since I make mine.) Being in that transitional stage of moving from Training level up to Preliminary—a gulf that seems so wide for us amateurs—I was open for any feedback and a realistic perspective from someone with experience. To me it's not simply about moving up the levels just to say so; as a parent I wanted to do it safely. If that meant staying at my current level, I was fine with that. But I was also curious about pushing the envelope to see what Paxton and I were capable of. I could think of no better way to do that than to test our skills in a controlled setting. The idea of small groups and a written assessment after a week's worth of training with one of the world's best made a lot of sense to me.

Open for anything, I loaded up trailer, waved goodbye to my family, and drove south on my quest with equal measures of excitement and curiosity for this new experience. I was not alone; ten other people from around the country were driving or flying to the same destination. On the heels of Phillip's Rolex Kentucky win and just weeks before the Olympic Games, were we the luckiest people in the world or what?!



THE PROGRAM

From Oklahoma to Hawaii and from Kentucky to Maine, 11 campers between the ages of 16 and 57 drove through the gates of True Prospect Farm with a similar objective: to learn as much from this setting as possible to become better horsemen and riders. We were a mixed and enthusiastic bag of individuals: ambitious teen-agers with upper-level goals, newly-minted high school graduates, newbies to eventing from other disciplines, those new to jumping altogether, business professionals, writers, and waitresses. The greatest thing about our sport is that it doesn't matter what age, gender, or competition level you are—a love of riding and desire to learn become a universal language. We became fast friends, learning as much from watching each other as we learned in our own lessons.

It was clear from the start that there was a lot of thought put into the design of this educational program, with one lesson leading constructively into the next. On the first and second days the group of riders was split into two: those who rode with Phillip and those who rode with Silva Martin, an FEI-level dressage rider at True Prospect who trained under Rudolf Zeilinger. Each rider got a private lesson with both.

Phillip sat on every camper's horse to gain insight into what each horse and rider was feeling. Some horses took a little more time to "find religion" than others, but each session ended successfully as Phillip sought to get the horses in front of the leg and responsive to the aids. Each rider then had the opportunity to be coached through flatwork exercises to better understand the feeling required to duplicate what was just reinforced to the horse. To accomplish this, riders worked on circles and half circles, leg yielding, and transitions through the gaits to get the horses moving forward before progressing to jumping questions.

"It's all about repetition and reward and working on the basics," Phillip said.

Later, each horse and rider progressed to riding back and forth on a line of two jumps, a vertical to oxer, handling it in five strides and then six. The key was to demonstrate the adjustability of each horse's canter stride and know when and how to modify it on course without relying on the hands. Later a bending line was incorpo-

TOP: Jean Marie Evringham of New Jersey (left), and Mini Gammell of Maryland (right), enjoy watching their fellow campers. **CENTER:** "It's all about repetition and reward and working on the basics," says Phillip. **BOTTOM:** Alex Jones and Reno Tune jump the *Road Crossing*.



ABOVE: All the riders and grooms had a chance to rest their weary bones and get a professional massage, courtesy of the Cortiva Institute.

The Perks

Throughout the week campers were given VIP treatment at the farm with unbelievable hospitality at every level. To our amazement many of True Prospect's horses were stabled off-site to make room for the campers in the barn, so we could absorb the on-site atmosphere! Our horses loved being bedded in straw up to their knees in large roomy stalls with automatic waterers. Paxton had a "room with a view" that looked out onto the main yard.

The riders were treated each day to breakfast, catered lunches, evening wine and cheese receptions, and an evening out at the local watering hole known as "The Whip." Meals and door prizes were sponsored by **Kentucky Equine Research**, **Nutramax Laboratories**, **Stoltzfus Feed & Farm Supply**, **Devoucoux Saddlery**, and **Charles Owen**. Giveaways included jars of Cosequin, saddle pads, new helmets, safety vests, backpacks, grooming totes, sun visors, caps, buckets of goodies, t-shirts, and at the awards banquet, artwork, riding equipment, and a picture of us with Phillip.

If that wasn't enough, the **Cortiva Institute** arrived on site with massage tables and chairs to work their magic on stiff tired bodies, and **The Body Shop** stopped by with a slew of products like peppermint foot lotion.

rated to test turning ability.

Meanwhile in Silva's sessions, each horse and rider combination utilized exercises and schooling figures to unlock each horse's way of going by riding them forward and increasing the activity of the horse's hind legs. Work was done on 10- and 20-meter circles, serpentine, through leg yielding and shoulder-in. Later, each rider could work on individual tests to work through challenging areas. The mantra of riding the horses from back-to-front was key.

As the week progressed, riders moved out in the jump field in small groups with Phillip to ride gymnastics. Grids, skinnies, liverpools, bending lines, and a corner fence provided a smörgåsbord of creative options to reinforce the prior lessons. The courses were designed to allow horses and riders to think intuitively, yet give the horses the freedom to be resourceful and balanced while riding to deep strong distances, not long weak spots.

When the third day was punctuated by the only rainy day of the week, cross-

country jumps were moved inside to Phillip's immense indoor. There riders found cross-country questions that included three vertical jumps placed in an off-set staggered line, requiring riders to weave through the series. The technical course also added a bounce, oxer, corner, and a skinny.

When the outdoor cross-country day finally arrived, earlier lessons once again were reinforced. Campers tackled a variety of fences such as a sunken road, skinnies, a large mound with a jump on top, corners, ditches, rolltops taken going uphill and downhill, and of course water questions. The emphasis was on control and preparation before and after the fences, adapting the balance to the terrain, and maintaining a confident forward pace to the base of the jumps—the safest of all distances—by allowing the fence to be the "bit" that slowed the horse down.

"You have to go around cross-country courses slow before you can go over them fast. Learn how to ride the questions first before you learn speed," Phillip said.

Camper Anna Kjellstrom from Kentucky

found a new confidence in her home-bred horse Copernicus, whom she successfully competed later in the week at Training level.

"You learn to jump things confidently you never thought were possible," she said.

Our final day of camp concluded with riding a dressage test of choice for Silva and then doing stadium rounds with Phillip in the afternoon at or above our current level.

"I feel like I learned more in the week that I spent at the Dutton Camp than I have in the past three years of lessons," Mini Gammell of Maryland said of her experience riding her mare Princess Buttercup. "Phillip, Boyd, and Silva helped me prepare a path to advance my eventing skills in all three phases."

READY, SET, GO!

Twice in our camp week we met in small groups with Boyd Martin, a four-star Australian rider who trains with Phillip at True Prospect. Boyd's focus was working on our galloping position, and later pace.

Boyd's first session left many a rider wincing and craving Advil as stirrups were



Gunther and Benji practice riding through the Road Crossing on cross-country day.

hoisted up by numerous holes to get us off our horse's backs and reposition our center of gravity over the horse's shoulders while galloping. That forward position was a revelation to many! Horse's were taught to respond to the rider's body position to both accelerate while leaning forward, or to re-balance by sitting up and not hauling on their mouths.

The second session with Boyd had riders galloping around the track, with markers set to establish a pace of 420 mpm. Each rider got to ride it twice with their watch, noting what each interval felt like. Then the third time all rode by feel. Most riders landed on or very close to optimum time. Riders also learned techniques for the start box and counting down.

FINAL EXAM

At the week's end, many campers opted to ride in Plantation Field Horse Trials to put all that we had learned to the test. Phillip provided stadium and cross-country course walks the night before and wished us well. I think I speak for many of the campers when I say we all felt completely prepared and no matter what level we were riding, we each found success whether it was an improved dressage score, a smooth-

Lecture Series

In between riding sessions, or at meal times, campers were treated to informative lectures from Phillip's associates, support staff, and sponsors. Phillip's veterinarian, **Dr. Kevin Keane**, kicked off the talks with "How to Keep Your Event Horse Healthy and Sound," which included a demonstration of a routine jog on Phillip's horses.

Dr. Joe Pagan, of Kentucky Equine Research, provided in-depth information on feeding and supplementation for event horses and gave us a bird's eye view of what the horses in Beijing will be eating.

Phillip's head groom, **Emma Ford**, gave campers amazing grooming and turn-out tips from braiding to quartermarks while showing us what she keeps in her grooming kit.

Linda Brown, a human fitness expert, showed riders core exercises to improve fitness and strength, and even tested pelvic flexibility.

Kasey Chamberlain, of Charles Owen, showed riders a dissected helmet and explained safety standards for safety equipment and then offered to measure our heads to insure our hats fit properly.

Lastly, **Eric Leysalle** of Jean Michelle Devoucoux Saddlery provided information on saddles and offered saddle fittings to the group.

er stadium round, or having the tools to conquer big cross-country jumps. For me the fairy tale week couldn't have ended any better; a second place at my first Preliminary event posting the smoothest double clears I've ever done. After working toward this goal for 30 years, that feeling of coming out of the last combination on a happy, confident horse, and racing to the finish line is about as good as it gets!

Phillip summed it up well during one of the dinners: "The process of riding well takes a long time, and there is no replacement for time and effort, being methodical, and chipping away at it. You are never at the top of your game, and you are always learning."

The next camp will be held September 14-19, 2008 before the Plantation Field Horse Trials. For more information, please visit <http://phillipdutton.com>.

