

Canadian Fjords Do Dressage

By Wendy Luscombe

I wish more people would consider Fjords for dressage and jumping. What I'm going to tell you here may just surprise you!

When I first started riding dressage about twenty years ago, I rode Arabians. I managed to get to Third and Fourth level (USA levels) and Lendon Gray, twice US Olympic team member, rode one of my Arabians at Grand Prix.

The Arabians taught me a lot and I greatly appreciate them for that. However, my scores were in the 58 - 62% range. My trainer told me if I ever wanted to improve my scores, I should get a Warm Blood. Well, I did and over the next few years I owned a Hanoverian and two Dutch Warm Bloods. The Hanoverian was once described as "a world class mover."

The experience did not go well. My scores on my "world class mover" moved up a bit to 64 - 65% and I never showed the Dutch Warm Bloods as one was too strong and the other was too hot. WCM got dangerous if asked to do movements beyond First level and finally dumped my trainer and broke his back. (He did recover)

I'd had it with Warm Bloods and I was going through a difficult period physically, spine fused, three hip replacements and a total replacement of my right shoulder. I still wanted to ride dressage but for fun, and safely. After all, I had owned my Grand Prix Arab and played with riding Grand Prix movements.

I remember once asking Lendon what she thought of Fjords as dressage horses. I had seen one at the Regional dressage championships, where he had done very well. I was struck at the bond with his human and how super he was to be around. Lendon's response? "They are not dressage horses but every barn should have one." I guess I just heard the bit about every barn having one and now I have six!

I bought all my Fjords from Blue Raven and Beaver Dam Farms in Nova Scotia, except one who I rescued. They were all bought as youngsters, and working with a super trainer we started showing at Training and First level.

Everyone, including me, was surprised at how remarkably well I did, considering I was not riding dressage horses! I was having a blast, never felt unsafe, and to this day I am the only one who shows my



own horses in the ring; even the youngsters at their first show get ridden by me not by my trainer. Think how many young Warm Bloods someone in my condition would take to their first show?

I am not going to bore you with a list of my winnings, but my Fjords were winning at both regional and national levels. All my shows were unrestricted recognized dressage shows and I competed against mainly very big, brown Warm Bloods. Most remarkable to me were my scores, now in the 65 - 70% range with many in the mid-70s and even one at 81%.

Contrary to my experience with the Arabians, where I seemed to be at a disadvantage, the judges liked my Fjords. I received comments such as "Can I take him home with me?" and "I can see why you ride Fjords." One judge at Saratoga Dressage show even wrote on Kingston's test, "I love (heart) this pony. He can do no wrong. Give him kisses and carrots for me." WOW. I was also Show High Score.

I have to give my trainer Jane Rodd of Cricket Hill Farm, in Ancram, New York, great credit here, too, as she is a patient, persistent classical trainer, who will be bothered to train Fjords.

I know Fjords are extremely cute and very personable but something else was catching the judges' eyes. I thought hard about what the judges liked and I went back over my tests to see if there was a general theme.

Judges appreciate the harmony between horse and rider (after all I am having a blast and it shows), they appreciate the rhythm and steadiness which, of course, is the starting point on the training scale AND they appreciate the movement. This may surprise some people but the scores I receive for gaits in the collective marks at the end of my tests are rarely below 7 and quite often an 8. The judges are saying they like the way these Fjords move! These scores are certainly comparable to what I have seen lovely moving Warm Bloods earn.

So for me, what started out as taking a back seat in dressage competitions took me to a level I had never even dreamed of, even with my Warmbloods. I remember smiling when I saw both Fjords, Koriakin and Kingston, in the top 50 USDF Horse of the Year standings at Training level, Amateur. That was out of well over a 1,000 horses of all breeds.

Dressage is not the only discipline where my Fjords have excelled. BDF Quest made it very clear to me that he wanted to jump. He would only humor dressage if he could jump, and jump very big and fast. As I don't jump, my friend Stephanie Kleinbauer trains and rides him. They have won open jumper classes, horse trials, dressage classes and even a hunter grand championship.

Quest recently won a four bar jumping competition. The first jump was 3' 3", the second, 3' 6", the third, 3' 9" and the fourth, 4' 3". He was the only horse to go clear. The last jump was bigger than him!



Stephanie Kleinbauer jumping Quest

Quest gets very annoyed before going into the ring, when bystanders say, "Oh isn't he cute. I didn't know Fjords jumped." Stephanie swears he always over jumps the first jump by at least 12" to make a point.

I am having an amazing experience and a lot of fun with my Fjords as you can probably tell.

Editor: Wendy Luscomb is an accomplished dressage rider with many years of solid show experiences. Check out Wendy's winnings: www.wendyluscombe.ws/about-wendy-luscombe