

Testimonial – Robyn Nietert

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For the past 2 months, I have been working with Katerina to train my newly acquired 12-year-old Quarter Horse/Morgan mare, who has spent her entire life as a trail/pleasure horse. It has been such a terrific learning experience for myself and my mare, Sierra.

Though very steady trotting through the woods and rarely spooking, Sierra had no prior ground training and had probably never worked in an outside ring or indoor arena. She had basically spent her life traveling in a straight line. She did not know how to lead or lunge. She carried her head high, hollowed her back, always trotted briskly with no moderation to her gait, and preferred to canter going up any inclines instead of using her hindquarters to propel her body forward. I have been playing polo for years and rode hunters and jumpers growing up but never had any natural horsemanship training so thought I would try it to teach my new mare how to use her body more comfortably and become more versatile.

Katerina started with the basics of how important it is to build a bond with your horse and to understand what your horse is trying to convey with certain behaviors. Once I realized that the point was to work cooperatively with my mare and create an experience we both enjoyed, everything Katerina began to demonstrate made perfect sense!

Starting groundwork with just small circles at the walk and trot, Katerina discussed the importance of proper head carriage, flexion, and engagement of the hindquarters - she immediately began to do simple lateral work with Sierra. To my surprise, after just a few sessions my mare learned and enjoyed executing shoulders in and out, half-passes, turn on the haunches and on the forehand. She began to anticipate when I gave the appropriate signal, and I could feel her begin to gather herself so that she could properly execute the commands.

Katerina [uses a combination of negative and positive reinforcement with an emphasis on listening to the horse] and I learned how to release when the mare had performed correctly. It was so encouraging to see how well Sierra responded to the positive encouragement,

relaxing with “lick and chew” behavior, and even yawning to show her comfort level when we completed an exercise successfully.

After a few sessions of groundwork, we began executing lessons learned under saddle. Starting from not being able to trot in a small circle, (falling in or turning out) Sierra now takes up contact when asked and can trot along calmly with basic collection. To strengthen her hindquarters, Katerina is working on stretching out her inside hind legs at the trot and adding in lots of lateral moves, taking her off the wall and moving her back with lateral motion. Since my mare had no background in ring work, Katerina is especially attuned to helping her understand what is being asked by guiding her through her paces while I am in the saddle. That has worked remarkably well. Once the mare understands the move and basic signal, even if I do not execute the command 100% correctly, she tries to figure it out and respond accordingly because Katerina has shown her how to do it correctly.

The transformation in Sierra in just two months is fantastic. She walks across the paddock to greet me when I arrive. She is holding her head more vertical, flexing at the poll, and her hindquarters are beginning to round out and become more muscular.

Our training sessions with Katerina are focused, but relaxed and fun. It's obvious that Sierra looks forward to them and enjoys the challenge of learning new skills. Katerina provides extensive analysis of a horse's issues, ways to correct problems, and theory on why certain approaches work and others do not. I especially appreciate that she provides a check list of items for me to work on between our sessions. It is really a wonderful and productive learning experience for me and my mare.