

## **My Experience with the 2020 Dressage Niagara Virtual Clinics**

I participated in the virtual clinics arranged by Dressage Niagara in June and July 2020, judged by Janet Henderson and Lynne Poole, respectively. This was Bellator and my second show season together, our first at First Level.

I was a little intimidated at first, seeing as my arena is not quite long enough and I wasn't sure who would video, or how I would get the right set up, but my desire to get feedback on my training over the winter kept me moving forward and figuring out a solution so that I could participate in the virtual clinics.

Our arena is about 50m x 30m (approximately). We have a larger outdoor eventing ring, but with the permanent jumps and obstacles there, I felt the arena was my best option. Fortunately, I had buckets to act as letters, and used poles to set up the arena to a size of 50m x 20m. For the first level tests, this required that my leg yielding be a bit steeper, but otherwise, the ring size worked quite well.

My partner was a good sport about videoing for me and did a pretty good job for someone who knows very little about riding through a dressage test! He stood outside the end door to film the tests (so he felt safer, and so we could use the full length of the arena) and turned on all the lights to ensure the videos were as bright as possible. One small issue we found with him being outside the arena was that the corners at his end of the arena were sometimes difficult for the judge to see.

I only learned of the June clinic a week ahead of time, so once I got the logistics worked out, I selected a day to ride my tests...my "show" day. I practiced that week and worked out some kinks. The Sunday of my test rides was very hot! I decided to braid and use my show bridle, but skipped the full show wardrobe. It felt great to braid and get Bellator all shined up and show ready!

The July filming day was much the same, but quicker as I had already done all the preparation to figure out how to set up the ring and do the filming in the best way possible.

Uploading the videos for both clinics was a breeze (and I've never uploaded anything to YouTube before), although a bit slow due to rural internet speeds!

Getting the tests back from the judges for both clinics was amazingly fast. It was such a positive experience for me to be able to not only get my feedback so quickly in a virtual event, but also to have some dialogue with the judges afterwards. Both were open to answering my questions, not only about my tests, but also about what I'm working on in my training. One of the judges was even kind enough to suggest some exercises for me to work on, and sent along links to some articles she thought would be helpful!

In summary, my virtual clinic experience was a very positive one. I found setting a "show day" for myself was helpful to treat it like a real event. One could always replay and redo the tests, but for me, I wanted as authentic of an experience as possible. As we all know, once we go in the ring, there aren't any restarts or do overs, and I treated it the same way.

Although it didn't feel the same as taking my horse off property for a traditional show, I also had no trailering stress or cost, it only took an hour or two from set up to tear down, and I could do it on my own schedule, which worked wonderfully. I still felt the show jitters!

I think the highlight for me was really the post ride interaction and feedback from the judges which is something one rarely gets in a traditional show setting. This type of information is invaluable and I've tried to incorporate it into my training for the 2021 "show season" and virtual clinics.

As someone who rarely had any videos of my rides before the virtual clinic, I found it very beneficial to watch the videos. Going forward, I'm going to try and get more regular videos of Bellator and I schooling to help me see what I'm feeling and what we can continue to work on.

I'm looking forward to the upcoming virtual clinics in 2021 and am grateful for the opportunity to continue to progress in our training, receive feedback, and work towards a time when we can all gather again in a traditional show setting.

