



## **True Discipline and Relentless Practice Makes Champions**

*A recap of the OEA's Clinic with Boyd Martin, November 3, 2024*

On November 3, 2024, the Ontario Eventing Association (OEA) welcomed Boyd Martin to Ontario for his first-ever Canadian clinic. Boyd Martin is a two-time 5\* Eventing champion, a two-time Pan-Am Games team and individual gold medalist and has represented the USA at four consecutive Olympic Games. He is a gritty, charismatic rider who embodies the fact that hard work and discipline can make your dreams come true.

The clinic was held at Springhill Farm, in Kettleby, Ontario, a beautiful venue donated for the day by Ann Neal and the hard-working team at Cold Creek Equestrian. Twenty-five lucky riders were selected through a lottery to make up five groups of five. Auditors were invited and filled the space to capacity, making up an enthusiastic crowd of spectators. It was a superb day for riders and auditors alike, emphasizing the importance of discipline and practice to master the finer details of riding.

The day began with a huge effort that rivalled the course setters at the Royal, to quickly build a course. The jump crew greatly appreciated the help of volunteers who raced around with standards and poles to build a master course, under Boyd's guidance, that was used effectively for the groups of riders that followed.

Group One showcased a very talented group of Ontario's horses and riders, including Olympian Selena O'Hanlon and her Advanced horse MS Thunderbolt. Boyd started this and every

subsequent group, with a 10 to 15 minute warm-up on the flat. He emphasized the importance for riders of creating a light, balanced seat, posting from the middle of the saddle forward, maintaining an 'elegant' posture and encouraging their horse to use their back and stretch over their top line. Using body weight aids and minimal to no rein, riders were asked to move their horses forward and back at the trot and the canter, and horses were encouraged to move between stretching and collecting.

***The little details make the exceptional riders.*** Boyd asserted that these first 10 minutes of any ride, when a horse is warming up, is the time to focus on the finer details of your riding. Although he delivered his directions gently, he nevertheless required riders to maintain an elegant posture at all times when mounted. As jump crew, I felt myself pull my shoulders back every time he delicately, and often with humour, admonished a rider for slouching. He spoke of the importance of 'self-coaching' when riding at home or without a coach and being disciplined and using mirrors or video feedback to correct your equitation on every ride.

Boyd then moved the riders into a further warmup exercise coming off each rein to a small fence. He instructed riders to ask their horses to approach the fence at a quiet canter, preferring the small warmup fence to be jumped off a slower canter that required the horse to use power and strength rather than momentum. He asked that riders get their horses to a shorter distance to the warm-up fence so the horses did not end up at a 'reaching' stride at the base of the fence.

The exercise then moved into several gymnastics where Boyd stressed that it's a rider's responsibility to get their horse correctly to the first fence, then to sit quietly and allow the horse to find its subsequent striding so that the exercise trains the horse. All horses worked their way through a gymnastic of verticals with 'V' poles added and rails placed in front of the jumps as they progressed, and the jumps got higher. Boyd spoke about creating tougher schooling opportunities at home that require greater adjustability of the horse, so that at a competition you have access to a higher level of rideability from your horse. Several riders throughout the day needed help understanding the importance of taking the time to create a good canter before starting the exercise. Use of the full arena was encouraged to create good shape and softness in the horses.

Each group then worked through three cross-rail bounces on a curved line. Under each fence Boyd had placed a cavalletti block for filler to encourage horses to jump through the exercise with a good shape over their back. He also talked about the benefit of working through the bounces on a curved line to help horses become more supple and soft in their backs and noted that he uses this exercise regularly in his own arena.

Following the initial gymnastics, the groups all moved into course work that combined the gymnastics with lines that required horses to open up and move along in their canter. The exercises highlighted the importance of the adjustability in the canter, and how the track both before and during the line dictates striding.

The exercises were adjusted accordingly for the EV90 groups and Boyd told those riders that pushing for the bigger strides over lower fences is not required and that chasing for a bigger step over lower heights can result in horses that are too fast and flat. He encouraged the riders to use the shape of their track to meet each fence from an appropriate canter.

Boyd concluded each group by assembling the horses and riders in front of the auditors and giving each one feedback and encouragement. Among other things, recommendations were given for individual horses for show days and warm-ups and there was a 'wish list' provided for schooling at home, focusing on the importance of flatwork for even the most talented jumpers.

The following pointers offered during the clinic require no additional explanation:

- Before fence #1 at a competition, lengthen your horse past the speed that you will require on course, then bring your horse back to the speed that you want at fence #1.
- Riders must develop the skill to find a 'moving-up distance' for a longer exercise and a 'waiting' distance for a shorter exercise. Just finding 'a distance' is not good enough; you must be more accurate.
- The mission to achieve roundness and suppleness for the tighter and 'wilder' horses is never ending and riders should not give in to the idea that tight and inverted is 'just the way that your horse goes.'
- Horses with naturally shorter strides should be encouraged to accelerate away from a jump.
- Accuracy in the number of strides in a line is very important. At the lower levels you might get away with adding strides in your lines, but once you reach the 2\* and 3\* levels you will get into trouble if your horse adds strides.
- The deciding factor on an upper-level horse is its ability to jump. Really talented horses may have difficulty being competitive at the lower levels, but as you move up the levels their scope and bravery will make them successful.

At the end of the day, Boyd gave a very encouraging talk to the entire group of riders and auditors emphasizing how talented the group of riders was that had been put together for the clinic, how impressed he was with the quality of Canadian horse-power and how that should bode well for future international success of Canadian eventers.

Boyd spoke of how easy it is to become 'normal' and how tempting it is to become 'boring' and, if you have a passion and a love for this sport, that trying to do what everyone else is doing could lead you to simply becoming mediocre. He reassured riders that when you make a commitment at any level it may be hard to see results day-to-day, but it's helpful to look back over six months or a year and reflect on how far you have come.

Finally, Boyd encouraged riders with that passion and love for Eventing to do the hard work and pursue the dream. He reiterated that true champions are disciplined and practice relentlessly and

that tomorrow isn't a day off but is a day to set yourself up to work hard and exercise the discipline and undertake the practice that will turn you into a Champion and help you achieve the makings of what can be a great life.

- Samantha Pritchard  
*Advanced Level event rider, EC Certified Coach &  
member of the OEA's Board of Directors*