



Austin Dressage Unlimited's (ADU) 6th Annual Judging Seminar
"Improving Your Judging Eye & Showing Skills"
featuring **Wim Ernes**



January 10–11, 2015 Southwestern University campus, Georgetown, Texas
Supported by The Dressage Foundation's Edgar Hotz Fund & USDF Reg 9 Education Fund
(photos may be seen at: <http://austindressageunlimited.org/photos2015.html>)

- 1st Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2010 with Gary Rockwell
- 2nd Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2011 with Maryal Barnett
- 3rd Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2012 with Hilda Gurney
- 4th Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2013 with Christoph Hess
- 5th Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2014 with Stephen Clarke
- 6th Annual ADU Judging Seminar in 2015 with Wim Ernes**



Each year Austin Dressage Unlimited (ADU) wonders "How are we going to top this one next year???" The line-up of outstanding speakers and teachers that we have hosted over the past 6 years is like a List of Who's-Who in the International Dressage World. Attendees have had trouble deciding which they think has been the best, as every one of them has been fabulous. Each speaker has so generously and thoroughly shared their knowledge, their methodologies, and their passion for Dressage each year. Attendees walk away amazed and in awe of what all they have just experienced and learned at these 2-day ADU Dressage educational Seminars.

Weather was an unexpected issue this January 10-11, 2015 weekend, as “sunny warm Texas” was anything but. A severe Arctic cold front, complete with freezing rain, snow, and ice, descended upon Texas on Friday afternoon. It started hitting the northern parts of our USDF Region 9 a couple of days earlier. Loyal attendees of our annual Seminar who live in Arkansas reluctantly called to cancel their drive to central Texas in the treacherous road conditions. Another loyal attendee from Oklahoma disappointedly called to cancel due to broken frozen water pipes in her house and barn. A few Dallas area attendees canceled due to the weather and icy roads. However, we had several local people call us up saying “The weather is too nasty to ride this weekend, can we still register and come to the Seminar?” And many brave souls (or crazy drivers) from all over Texas still made the annual migration to Georgetown, TX for our ADU Judging Seminar with Wim Ernes. Despite the nasty weather, we had 74 people register, including 6 Judges and 12 L Graduates/Candidates. Out-of-state-ers included 2 people who had flown in from Durango, Colorado, and someone who drove from Vinton, Louisiana. Around Texas we had registrants from Georgetown, Austin, Boerne, Coupland, Bartlett, Sadler, Lovelady, Liberty Hill, Round Rock, San Antonio, Houston, Leander, Pflugerville, Hutto, Katy, Lometa, Highland Village, Elgin, Bryan, Marion, Bulverde, Cedar Park, Smithville, Fredericksburg, Fort Worth, Aubrey, Alvin, Florence, Dripping Springs, Burnet, Harker Heights, and Taylor. We all stayed warm and dry for 2 days inside the beautiful huge lecture hall on the campus of Southwestern University in charming historic Georgetown, TX.



Rows of priority seating front & center were reserved for the Judges & L Graduates who attended this seminar as “full participants.” The Judges were invited to dinner with Wim on Friday evening. Judges & L Grad full participants were treated to lunch with Wim on Saturday in a private room in the University’s café.

Due to this year’s overall Seminar expenses being considerably higher than any other year, ADU sought out “Sponsors” to help us meet our financial needs. 14 individuals generously donated \$100 each to ADU to help us host this Seminar. These Sponsors were also given special seating behind the Judges/L’s, and welcomed to lunch with Wim on Saturday.

This year we featured a Seminar registration category for Instructor/Trainers to recognize them. They also had reserved special seating and were treated to lunch with Wim on Sunday, along with the Junior/YRs on this day.

Every seat in the house tho was a good one, and the audio/visual equipment in the lecture hall was quite impressive.

The hall was beautifully decorated by ADU volunteers with vases of flowers, garland, horse fabric table cloths, many horse statues, and welcome signs. Some of the horse decorations were so lovely, that more than 1 attendee asked if some of them could be given away as door prizes. Sorry. Altho we did have regular door prizes given at the breaks, including four gift certificates

generously donated by the newly opened tack shop in Austin, “Charlotte’s Saddlery.” Another favorite item was the popular ADU Equestrian’s Cookbook.



ADU, along with several other GMOs in the region (Dallas, San Antonio, Oklahoma), sponsored the morning coffee on Saturday, which expanded on Sunday to include tea, hot chocolate, and hot apple cider. The warm beverages were much appreciated by those coming in out of the freezing rain. The GMOs’ funding also provided endless bottles of water that were kept available for attendees at all times both days. Several of ADU’s members funded or made large trays of cookies, candies, homemade treats, and snack bags for attendees to help keep energy levels high. As one attendee stated “When you go to an ADU event, you never go away hungry!”

When preparing for the Seminar, ADU Education Team Leader, Carol Schmickrath, had contacted Wim ahead of time to see what kind of snacks, food, drink, and dinners he liked, so that we could plan for his dining enjoyment. He emailed her back saying that he was on a diet, so no snacks. That idea flew out the window tho once he arrived. We had a basket of food and drink ready for him in his hotel room – altho we did include a few Weight Watchers cookies. On Friday evening at dinner, we offered him a variety of culinary delights that he had never had before. We immediately saw how “game” he was to try new things such as the appetizers of frog legs & alligator. Saturday morning was Mexican breakfast tacos & sausage kolaches, which he liked so much he asked for them Sunday morning too. A Texas BBQ brisket sandwich was one of his lunches, not to mention a good old Texas beef steak at dinner. Yea, you go to an ADU event, and you never go away hungry.



Wim began the Seminar Saturday morning by explaining how he got started in judging at the age of 19 yrs old. He described himself as an angry young man, who thought he knew better than the judges he was performing in front of at the Dressage shows. His Dad told him that if he thought he was so smart, and knew so much more than the judges, then why didn’t he just become one? So he did. The rest is history.

One of the most impressive things about Wim's Seminar was his emphasis on the basics and the elements of the Training Scale. We all know the words and have heard the explanations. But Wim went further, explaining and showing repeated video of each of the elements in detail, really getting down to the very basics of the basics. For example, he showed video of good rhythm, obvious irregular rhythm, but also showing the not so obvious, especially at the walk, and the canter, where changing leads or direction sometimes resulted in changes in rhythm of the gait. The videos demonstrated relaxation that resulted in swinging through the back, a flowing movement, and increased elasticity, versus a nervous horse with stiffness and tightness in his body, and choppy or jerking movement. Wim frequently used slow motion in order for us to be able to see the differences. Then normal speed again for us to now learn to recognize it in real-time. This helped us develop our eye to see these details. Wim continued this in depth detail throughout each of the elements of the Training Scale.

He also pointed out the important fact that a dressage test is not all about just the glamorous movements like tempi changes, pirouettes, piaffe. Quite often the less exciting movements in a test have the same amount of points awarded as those big exciting movements. Therefore, Wim covered in detail the judging of some of the movements not often covered by other clinicians. For example, the reinback, stretching circle, counter canter, and simple change. We practiced judging the halt, and the walks. Wim emphasized how important these movements are, especially in establishing a solid foundation on a young or green horse.



Wim had a seemingly endless collection of video examples, showing horses doing the same movements or tests, but each with a different combination of good points and bad points. He showed how, often times, horses can perform a movement in very different ways, but end up with the same score for the movement based on the different modifiers. He made the judges watch closely and really think about what they were seeing. As one L Grad commented, "No one got to shirk during this seminar. We had to work to learn, it was great!"

Early on the first day of the Seminar, Wim would show a movement, then ask the Judges/LGrads what they thought of it. Inevitably the responses would be pointing out the errors in the movement and what the participants did not like about it. But with Wim's instruction over the two days, there seemed to be an attitude adjustment among the judging participants and audience. He trained everyone to think differently, to start out thinking of the positives, what the horse did well. There is always something good about the horse/rider. Not to focus so intently on what the horse did not do well. In a thank you note created for Wim, one attendee said, "Thank you for your patience

with some American point of views and for your wonderful efforts on educating the USA. You are wonderful.”

Wim consistently emphasized that the movement should first be evaluated in the judge’s mind as to whether or not the basic elements of the Training Scale are there. Always look at the Positives, giving credit for those first, *then* subtract the Negatives *to an appropriate degree*. If the “essence of the movement” is accomplished, then it is a score of at least 6. Look for the important things, the technical execution of the movement. Other things are minor. If the quality is above average, reward positive modifying points. Then look at negatives. But don’t over penalize for negatives that are only modifiers. For example, if the horse is not exactly on the CL, it is a minor fault, perhaps maybe a 0.5 deduction at the most. He encouraged the judge participants to be confident in the score they give and also to be able to provide rationale for the score. The judges appreciated Wim’s “wisdom to develop us.” As one commented “Your methodical program has been ideal for supporting my growth as a ‘mindful’ judge.”



Throughout the weekend, Wim had a talent for engaging the entire audience. He appreciated and prompted comments and discussion. He continued to educate and entertain various small groups of us dressage enthusiasts during lunches and dinners throughout the weekend. Below are comments that represent the general feelings of the various groups of attendees at this Seminar. Some comments are taken from the USDF evaluation forms, some are taken from the large Thank You note that was passed around to attendees at the lecture hall on Sunday before the end of the Seminar.

From a new to the sport dressage enthusiast:

Being very new to the dressage world as a whole, I felt that your explanations were very clear and easy to follow. Your analysis of every movement gave me a great image as to what to expect to see as I progress into this discipline.

Amateurs:

- *I have been inspired to work harder. I now understand more of what is required at the levels I am aiming for.*
- *A fun, down-to-earth gentleman. An incredible eye for detail. Able to explain topics on our level.*
- *I have been truly enlightened! What an excellent speaker & presentation.*

Instructor/Trainer:

I really enjoyed seeing the dressage movements through your educated eye. It helps me to think about the training of my horses and the directions to take them in.

L Grad:

Mr Ernes brought with him a plan with many so-useful videos, & worked the plan methodically. I feel truly that my eye is better trained. SO worthwhile. My favorite of the 6 ADU symposia offered & attended.

Judge:

Simply the best seminar I have ever attended! Never condescended and presented incredibly erudite evaluation of all horses & movements.

Comments that summed it all up:

Very very good!

10++++

Big 10

The Seminar was over on Sunday late afternoon. Wim's flight back to Holland did not leave until mid-afternoon on Monday. So ADU Education Team Leaders Carol Schmickrath & Cean Embrey told him they would pick him up at 10am on Monday morning and show him around Austin before taking him to the airport. They continued to see how "game" and "brave" Wim was. When they got to the hotel and called on Wim, he said he was a little behind schedule. Earlier he had left the hotel along the highway and gone out jogging in the chilly foggy weather towards the town. As he was running on trails along the river in a park, he realized he was lost – and without a cell phone. He explained how he climbed the riverbank hillside and popped out on a city street. Lo and behold (luckily) it was a street he remembered from when his ADU chauffeur had driven him around the town on the weekend to show him a few sites. So his jog was about an hour longer than intended, but he made it back on his own 2 feet to the hotel.

Carol & Cean had another adventure planned for Wim that morning. They drove him out into the Texas countryside to a rancher Carol knew. He took us across the road to his grazing pasture, gave a holler, and here comes a small herd of Texas Longhorn cattle thundering up to the fence. Carol asked if it was safe for us to take Wim inside the pasture to get a closer look at the steers with their impressive horns. The rancher said "Sure! Errr... at least I *think* so." Wim didn't hesitate, and we all entered thru the gate and into the group of colorful speckled bodies and sea of horns. The most impressive was a large black & white steer with horns wider than Wim's outstretched arms. We took photos of Wim with this steer, one of which he intends to send to the KWPN with the caption that he was "Talent Scouting" in Texas.



The following is a note that Austin Dressage Unlimited (ADU) received from Wim Ernes after he returned home, giving his opinion of the 2015 ADU Judging Seminar:

A very enthusiastic group of judges, riders, trainers attended my course Jan 10-11th, organized by ADU. The organization was, from the preparations on up to the departure back to Holland, detailed with an excellent follow up. I would say in judge's terms a 10+. The college room was an ideal place to teach, with high quality audio and computer systems. The group wanted to learn as much as possible and was very concentrated and coöperative. The hospitality great, with very helpful and friendly people. I enjoyed the whole 2 days and am happy I have some new friends in the Texas area.

Cheers, Wim

