

NEWS OF NOTE

THE RUTLEDGE FARM SESSIONS: MCLAIN WARD REALLY IS SOLID GOLD



LAUREN R. GIANNINI

The Rutledge Farm Sessions debuted with a clinic taught by Olympic medalist McLain Ward, who offered a solid gold learning experience that showed his expertise as a professor of horsemanship. McLain was showing at Upperville that week and, as exciting as he is in action over big jumps, he lived up to his reputation of being a thoughtful, detail-oriented clinician, thereby raising the bar on what riders should expect to take away from a clinic.

On June 6, more than 50 people gathered at the outdoor arena of Rutledge Farm, managed by Aleco Bravo-Greenberg whose sights are focused on turning his mother and late father's Thoroughbred breeding facility into a world-class hunter-jumper venue where amateurs and professionals can learn from high-performance riders.

McLain has won three Olympic medals in show jumping: two team gold (2004 Athens, 2008 Beijing) and team silver at 2016 Rio, plus medals in the World Championships, World Cup, and Pan American Games. McLain's equine partners include the great mare Sapphire with whom he earned both Olympic gold medals, plus team silver at the 2006 World Equestrian Games, Aachen.

The four riders in the clinic included local hunter-jumper rider-

trainer, Gavin Moylan, who rode with McLain for the first time.

"I really liked his focus on good equitation and form," Gavin said. "Encouraging us to practice good habits with our body angles to maintain the best control of the horse. Also, he emphasized the consistent use of our eyes going forward. The use of the eyes and carrying one's hands above the withers made me want to call out to my students, who were auditing the clinic, and ask them: 'Did you hear what McLain just said? We work on this all the time!'"

Another topic that resonated with Gavin was McLain's emphasis on the importance of making your dressage and flatwork applicable to the jumper ring. "McLain said to work with your horse on the flat and seek what is difficult for them, but the aim is for the flatwork to support your jumping, not to execute a dressage test."

Words of wisdom from one of the best, and he certainly influenced horses and riders, improving their performance from start to finish. Watching McLain teach four riders at Rutledge Farm was like being witness to a master of his craft as he exhibits great understanding that riders are only as good as their basics and making adjustment and suggestions so they could be better at achieving their goal: jumping clear rounds over big, airy painted fences with cups so shallow that rails sometimes topple just by the swish of air created by a horse in full bascule.

McLain focused on the importance of all the little details: position of your toe on the iron, picking up the horse a little if it gets too low in front, slowing down and establishing a rhythm – to name just a few.

with McLain," Gavin said. "I found his teaching system to be very similar to what I try to practice. A lot was very affirming. He did pay a great attention to detail – he doesn't miss anything. As I don't often have someone critiquing my riding, it was wonder-

good pace and rhythm, McLain summarized his approach: "Position is key, solid lower leg, good balance in the upper body, nice contact with your hands. It's all about your position."

There's actually more to it



It isn't fair to other outstanding rider-trainers to say nobody does it better, but watching McLain teach enhances his already brilliant career record. No doubt there will be a stampede to secure a spot the next time McLain returns to Middleburg to teach another Rutledge Farm Sessions clinic.

"I would definitely ride again

ful to have someone hone in so quickly on what would best help my riding. I will use my videos from the clinic as a self-teaching tool."

It's a known fact that riders are only as good as their basics. Besides getting the horse moving forward and straight, bending around the inside leg, with

than that — all those endless little details, which start with the rider. The Rutledge Farm Sessions will offer more clinics (dates TBA): Will Simpson in late summer, Chris Kappler in November, Leslie Burr-Howard in mid-November, and Peter Wylde in June 2019.

For more information: www.rutledgefarm.com