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California Riding Magazine • April, 2010

Camilla Fritze: Galavant Equestrian Happy clients and horses are hallmarks of Somis dressage program.

Camilla Fritze has the best of all trainer testimonials: happy clients. Based at the privately owned Whitethorne Ranch in Ventura County's Somis, Fritze operates a small-scale dressage training program that emphasizes quality instruction, training and care for horses and riders.

Whether they are beginners riding her school horse or are pursuing FEI level competition, students at Fritze's Galavant Equestrian receive highly personalized instruction and training. Fritze accepts and welcomes a limited number of new training clients, but only up to about 15 horses, so that she can continue to offer that level of close attention and care. "Unless they fall upon hard financial times or something like that, most of my clients are extremely loyal and don't leave," she notes.

The USDF bronze and silver medalist grew up riding dressage and jumping in her native Sweden, where, "boys played soccer and girls rode horses." Throughout her youth, "I was always the working student who rode all the young crazy horses," she recalls. "I have long legs, so they figured I wouldn't fall off!" Those experiences served her well when she moved to the United States at the age of 22 and found work with several Southern California training barns. These included Elvenstar and Beth Cadwallader's hunter/jumper programs.

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Fritze went into business for herself as a dressage trainer 10 years ago. Success for herself and her students in the show ring has come hand-in-hand with the pleasure of helping riders advance at home. Her clientele includes those who own horses that she competes and amateurs who campaign their own mounts.

Another Galavant Equestrian trademark is happy horses. Fritze is a big believer in the value of variety in a horse's life. In addition to the regulation-sized dressage court, Whitethorne Ranch has a quarter-mile track, two large jumping arenas and a grass jumping field. Fritze incorporates all these settings into her horses' training and it's rare that any of her horses work in the same environment two days in a row. Cavaletti and small jumps are frequently part of her dressage horses' routines and the track is often a great place to work on tempi flying lead changes or other dressage movements. "Jumping is good for strengthening and coordination and for keeping the mind fresh," she says. "And, just because it's a track doesn't mean you have to race on it."

Some of her students like having their lessons in the dressage arena with its mirrors on the short end. "That's fine," Fritze comments. "I just make sure that, if I ride the horse the next day, we don't work in the dressage arena. Horses that have more to their life than one routine are happier." Fritze learned this lesson many years ago. "I used to work for an old man in Sweden, one of those self-taught, really clever guys. He would always mix things up. He used to send us out on the trail and say, 'Don't come back for two hours'."



Getting It Straight

Body alignment is an area of focus in Fritze's work with riders. "If the rider is sitting right, their aids will be correct and the horse can much more easily do what he's being asked to do," she notes. "It's a lot easier for the rider to apply the right aids if they are sitting in balance and do not get in the way of the horse." Finding this alignment results from a combination of a student's learning correct body positioning and then actively feeling it. "Once they have that knowledge and feel, people become more confident. They can tell for themselves that their position and aids are correct and consistent. There are no question marks."

Equestrian-oriented Pilates is a big part of Fritze's own riding regimen and she advocates it passionately for her students and any rider who wants to get the most from their riding time. Fritze works with Equestrian Pilates® founder Elizabeth Hanson. "It has made a huge difference," she enthuses. "Everyone's body is crooked or imbalanced to some degree, even those with great posture."

"If a person is riding the same horse all the time, both rider and horse start compensating for their imbalance. Part of my job as an instructor is to make riders aware of and correct their position, posture and imbalance and that is so much easier to do if people are also actively working on this off the horse. You will get there much quicker."



Fritze also advocates working with outside coaches. Her favorite, for herself and her students, is fellow Swede Lena Wedenmark, whose next bi-monthly visit to Galavant Equestrian will be in late May. "I am always open to input from other professionals," Fritze says. "I think it's a huge mistake for teachers and instructors to not take lessons. Even when you can look in the mirror at yourself, there's nothing that beats a good person on the ground." The Florida-based Wedenmark coached riders who qualified for several Pan-Am Games. Her clinics typically fill before they are even announced to the public, but auditing is always welcome.

Galavant Equestrian's show schedule goes where clients' desires and ambitions dictate. Based in Somis, Fritze and her students don't have to travel far to the Cornerstone Events competitions and other shows in Moorpark, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Trips to San Diego and Northern California are booked as appropriate. In addition to campaigning her clients' horses, Fritze enjoys the show scene with a project horse that has become Galavant Equestrian's namesake. A Canadian-bred Swedish Warmblood, Galavant came Fritze's way several years ago as a "steal" because he was deemed "unrideable." After "just letting him be for a long time," Fritze started his training from scratch. That was in May of 2007 and by that September, he earned high point champion at Training Level at the DASC Championship show.



For more information on Camilla Fritze and Galavant Equestrian, visit www.galavantequestrian.com or call 310-924-1220.