

Introduction to Dominique Barbier Clinics

I first met Dominique Barbier at a one-day clinic in Colorado in 1991. I trailered my big chestnut Arabian, The Red Rolls, over mountain passes in a wintry November as a last-ditch effort to get help with his training. I had been trying to train him in dressage for over 2 years with many good and accomplished professionals, but our partnership remained an unmitigated disaster. In fact, many of the trainers I had worked with counseled me to “get rid of him”. The worst of it and the blow to my ego was that I had trained dozens of horses prior to this horse with tremendous show ring success. I couldn’t figure out what I was missing.

I entered the arena at the clinic barely in control of my big horse, emotions overflowing with frustration. Dominique relieved me of my charge and worked him for the first 15 minutes of the lesson. Before long he exclaimed, “This is a magnificent horse”. I couldn’t believe my ears or eyes. In only one day, I began to see what was possible with my “problem” horse as well as the methodical work ahead of me that was necessary to achieve that possibility.

When I returned home, I diligently followed Dominique’s coaching and method and within a few months had a completely new horse, or should I say, I had a completely “new relationship” with my “old” horse. This selfsame “problem” horse even learned to piaffer!

I have been pursuing my dressage training professionally since that eventful day in 1991 and have taken innumerable lessons with Dominique and hosted many clinics. I also travelled with him to Brazil and France. Although my entire riding journey has taken a few diversionary paths along the way, I am constantly coming back to my training with Dominique; it is my lodestone, and I will always remain deeply grateful for the gift his teaching has given me — a profound and ever evolving connection with my horses.

If you are participating in a clinic for the first time with Dominique, here are a few bullet points to help you prepare for what will hopefully become a great clinic experience:

1. The lessons are short, around 30 minutes, centered on the fundamentals each student and horse need to address that day/time.
2. Each lesson starts with longeing and work-in-hand followed by riding. You may use a snaffle or double bridle (as appropriate for advanced horses). Lunge lines, side reins, and whips will be available if you need to borrow them for the session. Also, students familiar with the method will be available to assist as necessary.
3. Ask questions! Except, of course, when you need to concentrate on what you’re doing! Dominique welcomes questions from both participants and auditors throughout the day.
4. Familiarize yourself with the Barbier method and philosophy. There are some wonderful excerpts on YouTube explaining techniques including the lunging, work-in-hand and shoulder-in (links found below). Also, his book, Dressage for the New Age, provides an excellent overview of the totality of Dominique’s training.

5. The 4-track shoulder-in is the cornerstone of Dominique's training. It has a much greater angle than the 3-track shoulder-in demonstrated in dressage competition. The 4-track is the "original" shoulder-in and opens the door for true collection and self-carriage.
6. Feel free to reach out to me personally if you have further questions or concerns:
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Links:

This is the Barbier channel on YouTube that contains excellent explanatory content:

<https://www.youtube.com/@DominiqueBarbier>

Here is an excellent interview with Dominique from 2 years ago:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhkkrvbRvYE&t=5100s>