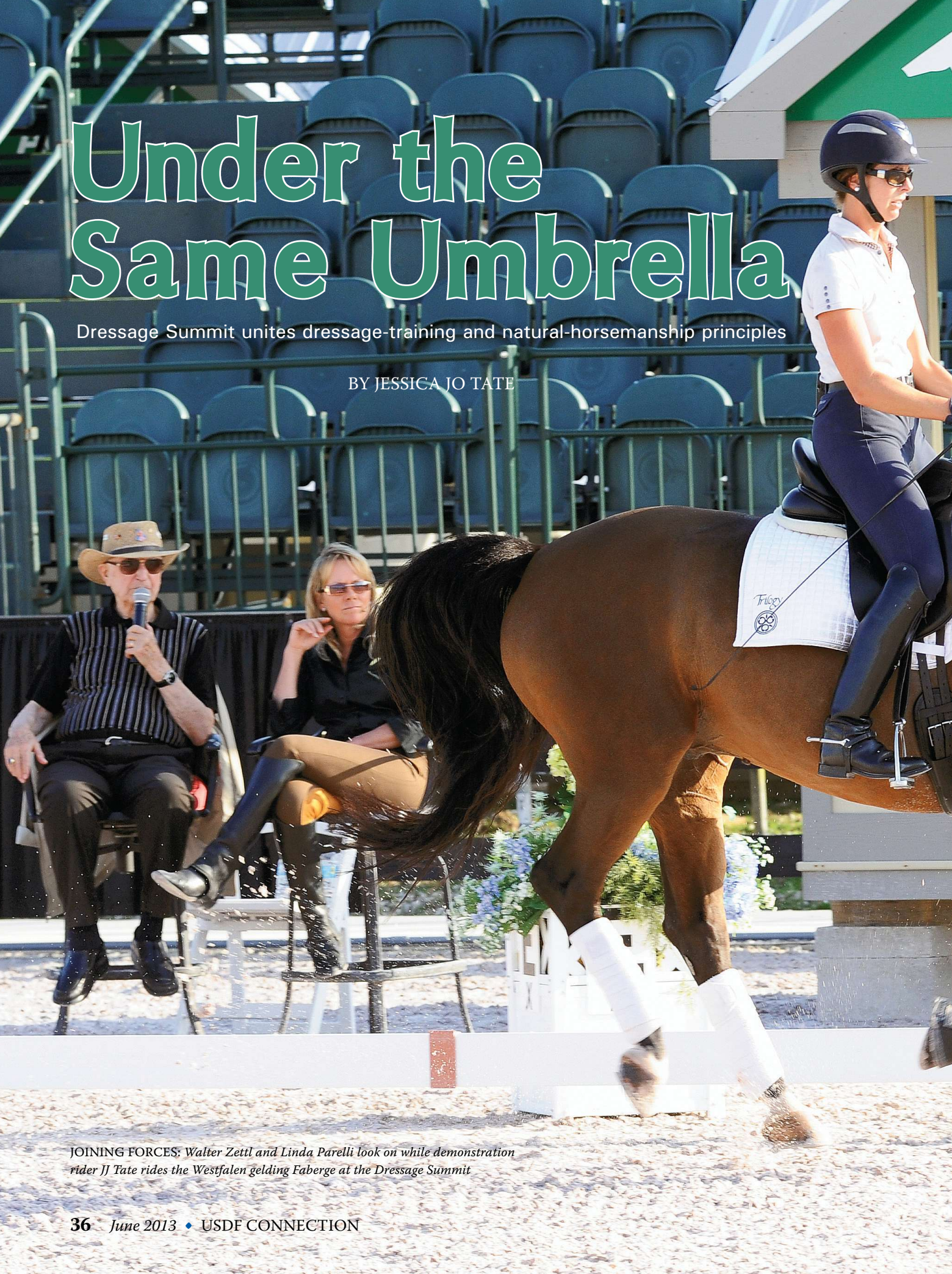


Under the Same Umbrella

Dressage Summit unites dressage-training and natural-horsemanship principles

BY JESSICA JO TATE



JOINING FORCES: Walter Zettl and Linda Parelli look on while demonstration rider JJ Tate rides the Westfalen gelding Faberge at the Dressage Summit



COURTESY OF PARELLI NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP

In an ideal sense, dressage embodies horse and rider harmony: One being thinks and the other does. Dressage, at its most beautiful, is two species joining together in a partnership, with both becoming more together than they could ever be apart. One of the biggest challenges in the equestrian world is to harness the horse's flight instinct and to channel that energy into a powerful and precise performance.

The Dressage Summit, held February 9-11 at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center in Wellington, FL, brought together three legendary horsemen to discuss these ideals and challenges: Walter Zettl, Charles de Kunffy, and Christoph Hess, all known for their understanding and dedication to classical dressage. Walter Zettl of Canada is known for his kindness to the horse, as shown in his books and DVDs, including *Dressage in Harmony* and *A Matter of Trust*. Californian Charles de Kunffy, a retired FEI dressage judge, is the author of six books and a world-renowned clinician. FEI 4* dressage judge Christoph Hess is the head of instruction at the German National Equestrian Federation in Warendorf. In addition, Colleen Kelly, a former dressage judge from Australia, added her expertise on the biomechanics of the rider.

The Parelli Connection

Colorado-based Pat and Linda Parelli, who for many horse lovers are synonymous with natural horsemanship, had the vision to bring together the worlds of natural horsemanship and dressage in the Dressage Summit. The event, the first of its kind, was held with the understanding that good horsemanship is good horsemanship, regardless of the tack or attire, and it all benefits the animals we love. The Parellis' stated goal for the Summit was to focus on "working together to build stronger horse/human partnerships in classical dressage."

What many dressage riders may not know is that Linda Parelli started as a dressage rider with a problem horse. She met Pat Parelli at a clinic and realized she had much to learn about her horse's behavior. She also soon understood that her dressage was not going to improve until she fixed the relationship with her horse because she needed to learn the reasons behind his behavior.

Pat and Linda Parelli later married, and for years Linda focused on her husband's natural-horsemanship methods. But recently Linda decided to get back to her love of dressage, and so the couple searched for the right mentor. They found Walter Zettl, and that is how this blending of natural horsemanship and dressage came to light. We all are in-



THE CLINICIANS: *Walter Zettl, Charles de Kunffy, Linda Parelli, Pat Parelli, Colleen Kelly, and Christoph Hess*

involved with horses because we love them, and we want to learn how to think more like a horse, and consequently, how to create safer and more rewarding relationships with them.

Key Learnings

Here is a short summary of what we learned during the Dressage Summit.

- Too much hand works against the nature of the horse. Horses have a very strong flight instinct, and exces-

sive pulling or controlling the horse by his mouth goes against his natural desire to move forward.

- The horse's mouth is his most sensitive part, both emotionally and physically. If a horse feels trapped, pulled, or held, he will become very afraid of this pressure.
- Take time now so it takes less time overall.
- Every aspect of horse training always goes back to basics.
- If you are not part of the solution, then you must be part of the problem.
- Every time you interact with a horse, you are training him. Be sure to train the things you want him to learn.
- Better to do less sooner than too much later.
- A buck, bolt, or rear is nothing more than a brace exaggerated into its highest form.
- Get the maximum from the horse by using the minimum amount of aids.
- The timing of the release, such as after a half-halt, is the key to training.
- Do not micromanage the horse in order to prevent mistakes. Learning happens when mistakes happen. Allow the horse to learn.
- Riding and handling horses is a relationship of responsibilities on both sides.

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COURTESY OF PARELLI NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP

- A rider must have an independent seat and a high level of focus and willpower.
- Fix your relationship with your horse first; then specialize in whatever sport you choose to do.

From Confidence, Success

Pat Parelli emphasized that natural horsemanship is not a discipline in itself. It is the beginning of the development of a relationship between horse and human to establish trust and cooperation. Creating a confident horse makes success at any sport possible. When your horse trusts you, is confident in your leadership, and is truly your partner, there is nothing you can't accomplish!

It was truly exciting and inspiring to have all these great horsemen in one arena, sharing their thoughts about the animals we love and helping us learn how to connect with our horses on so many different and deep levels. Over the three days, one could take countless notes and later not be able to determine who said which jewel of knowledge because it was all under the same umbrella of correct horsemanship. ▲



WESTERN MEETS ENGLISH: Pat Parelli on the 22-year-old Quarter Horse Magic and JJ Tate on Faberge, a 2003 Westfalen gelding owned by Elizabeth Guarisco-Wolf

Jessica Jo ("JJ") Tate is a USDF bronze, silver, and gold medalist and an accomplished FEI-level and Young Horse competitor, trainer, and clinician. As a young rider, she rode on three Region 2 FEI North American Young Riders Championships teams, culminating with a team silver medal in 1999.

Tate has trained with Walter Zettl and Charles de Kunffy, whom she calls her mentor, among many others. She served as a demonstration rider for the Dressage Summit. She is now based at Riveredge West in Chesapeake City, MD. Her website is team-tatedressage.com. This is her first article for USDF Connection.

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