

Staying Safe in the Hunt Field and Jumping Clinic with Aidan O'Connell
Mosey Spring Farm
Mosby Hwy Middleburg, VA
April 22 and 23, 2006

Kay Brady gave us this report on the clinic she attended with her horse Taff. It was the same weekend of the heavy rains that caused our lesson marathon weekend to be cancelled – so you can only imagine what the mud was like, but just normal conditions for an Irishman!

Well, what can I say! Be careful what you wish for. I always wanted to know how to jump as safe as possible in torrential downpours and I got my wish. We started out each day in the pouring rain. Descending the steep down hill jumps, all you could do was gulp; pray while leaning back, legs forward, slipping the reins as you go, while you slip and slide the whole way down the bank and over the jumps. Aidan would yell out, "Kick on toward the jungle out there!"

Aidan began by first teaching us on flat ground. He would show us the technique of how to approach a downhill fence, ditch, jump, or step up and then have us practice that technique going over a log. He said to always approach as straight as possible. Just before the jump, you sit, squeeze, then release the reins as you go over while keeping your hands low, but cautioned against pushing down on the horse's neck if possible.

He also showed us how to canter in the deep mud up a steep hill, and then jump the log at the top in the same way. The only difference is that going up the hill, you stay off the horse's back in two point then just before the jump you sit, squeeze, and release.

Later we went to a ditch with a step up of about 2'7" (by this time it is soup out there). He reminded us that when jumping anything, we need to keep our heads up and directed at our focal point, not staring at the obstacle at hand, which, by the way, really works for the horses balance.

Often we had to start off in a canter because of the deep mud past the horse's fetlocks. At one point, we had to jump two obstacles separated by three strides going towards the bank. After clearing the first jump, Aidan instructed us to immediately get up and stay off the horse's back until the last stride, then release the reins, jump the step up, bounce, and then go over the next jump while releasing the rein a little more. Again he reminded us to keep our eyes up and keep the horse straight by giving lots of leg. Your seat has to be very independent of the reins while feeling with your leg when your horse is going to jump.

It was an amazing clinic with about 20 horses. When the sun finally came out the last two hours of the last day, we all went, "Oh no!" We wanted more practice in the rain. Great experience, which was totally focused on safety! Aidan will be giving another clinic when he comes back from Ireland this fall.