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THE HORSEMAN





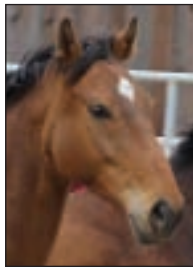
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Milly Hunt Porter

Terry Church was trained through the FEI levels in dressage in both the United States and Germany. But after years of competing with tension as the predominant factor, she began a ten-year "apprenticeship" with Tom Dorrance, who helped her relearn everything she thought she knew about horses, and about herself. Currently, her clinics throughout the U.S. reflect this broadened perspective, appealing to horsemen of all disciplines. Learn more at naturalsporthorse.com.



Chris Sobenes

Tom Moates is a leading equestrian author and journalist. His latest book, *Passing It On*, the fifth in the "Journey into Honest Horsemanship" series, is available. More info at tommoates.com.

Wendy Murdoch has taught riding internationally since 1987. She trained with Linda Tellington-Jones in 1985. She first trained with Sally Swift in 1986 and apprenticed with her in 1992. Learn more at wendymurdoch.com.

Milly Hunt Porter edited *Think Harmony with Horses* by Ray Hunt and *True Unity* with Tom Dorrance. Between editorial projects, she published *Hey Elko*, a collection of her original verse, inspired by the city and county of Elko, Nevada. She wrote *The Horse Gods* in 1994 and lives in Bruneau, Idaho. Learn more at giveitagobooks.com



Alice Trindle

Chris Sobenes has been a lifelong equestrian acquiring her first horse early in life. In 1987 Chris rode in a Ray Hunt clinic and that experience began her journey to change the way she worked with horses. Chris now teaches horses and their riders the fine art of Horsemanship at her ranch in Oak View, CA.

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five sons. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Wash., Calif., and Idaho. Learn more at tnhorsemanship.com.

On the Cover:

"Skin" and "Terry" enjoy the afternoon sun in the Pahsimeroi Valley, near Challis, Idaho. Photo by Melanie Elzinga.



Hi All,

It's hard to believe that we are reaching the end of another year. I want to extend a "Thank-You" to each and every one of you who subscribes to Eclectic Horseman Magazine.

This actual physical magazine that you are holding in your hand would not exist without you. Your subscription makes this possible. Open it, close it, flip through the pages, feel the paper in your hand. Thank you.

The verb "to subscribe" has several meanings, the straight-forward one which, if you are holding this magazine, assumes you have done. But the more subtle "to belong to or support something" is the one that I hope you also know is appreciated. Those of us interested and invested in good horsemanship know that it is not just for ourselves that we want to learn how to be better with our horses; it is to help all horses in this world get a better deal from the humans they are partnered with. I believe that knowledge turns on the light, to help us see and know the world for what it truly is. I hope that with every issue that goes out the door more knowledge and more light is going out into the world too. I hope the information packed into this issue will help turn on some lights for you and connect you to a wider community of like-minded horse folks who subscribe to and believe in good horsemanship too.

I make an effort to include a clinic report in each issue. I hope that you will find it interesting and also inspiring to get out there and support and learn from the clinicians. If you can go, setting aside the time to learn and grow with your horse with the company and support of like-minded folks is well

worth the price. And, if you can't afford to go and ride, go and audit; you will be amazed at what you learn by watching the clinician on their horse, watching others work to learn, and visiting with other spectators about what you are seeing.

Thank you for all the positive feedback on Diane Longanecker's "The Six Progressions: An Introduction to the Half-Circle/Teardrop Exercise" (Issue #89) featuring exercises taught by Buck Brannaman in his clinics. I received quite a few phone calls and emails about this article. It is always great to know when what we publish is helpful (and when it is unhelpful). Please send your emails or call, and let me know when we are hitting, or missing, the mark.

We have another new addition to the collection of fantastic Tom Dorrance DVDs, "Through the Corral Fence with Tom Dorrance- Horse and Human Projects No.1." Listening to Tom and watching his instruction through those he was helping is truly inspiring. There was so much going on, on so many levels. I am so thankful for the opportunity to help Margaret bring this footage to all of you students of horsemanship.

There are so many facets to learning good horsemanship. Take advantage of all the modalities of learning if you can: clinics, trainers, friends, books, magazines, DVDs... and, of course, your horse.

Thank you and take care. We are all on this horsemanship journey together. I look forward to sharing it with you.

Mission Statement *To be the best resource to help students develop their own horsemanship.*

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Lateral Work

Round Table with Buck Brannaman, Melanie Taylor, Ellen Eckstein and Jim Hicks

By Tom Moates

Asking a horse to move in a direction other than straight forward or backward is referred to as a “lateral” movement. Lateral work is considered essential in some equine disciplines, but for others, as well as for the basic trail rider, it may not be a familiar aspect of horsemanship. So why is lateral work important to horsemanship and what might riders and their horses be missing who have not incorporated it into their horsemanship toolboxes? Below, four expert equestrians discuss these questions to provide their insights on the matter.

Buck Brannaman is a phenomenal cowboy and clinician who travels the country conducting clinics. His skill in the saddle and with a rope is matched only by his ability to teach safe and effective horsemanship to riders of all ability levels. He has authored the books *Groundwork* and *The Faraway Horses*, and has produced many horsemanship videos.

“I often tell people this in the clinics,” Buck Brannaman says when asked about the benefits of lateral work, “that anybody that’s had much experience with horses understands that you never fix a troubled horse by pulling on two reins. Look at riding, as you’re planning out your ride on any horse, like you’re a choreographer and lateral flexion is the first thing you go to. But it’s not just lateral flexion, it’s lateral flexion with lateral movement—whether it would be moving the hindquarters right or left or the front quarters right or left—that’s your basics that you check out.”

Buck sometimes has riders work serpentines, circles, and figure-eights to see if they can feel of their horses and move in balance with all four of the horses’ “corners” in an even way.

“Only then, when a horse is moving even on all four corners, would you even entertain the notion of picking up on two reins,” Buck explains. “But that’s when you would—when

things check out. Then of course, you introduce vertical flexion, which I refer to as a soft feel, with a horse perfectly straight going in a straight line. So you teach the flexions, lateral first, then with lateral movement, then vertical flexion with forward movement, then vertical flexion with lateral flexion with forward movement, and of course there are exercises that are associated with all of those flexions.”

Riding horses based on their individual levels of ability is key to success, Buck stresses.

“With every horse that you ride, you’re going to reach a limit to that horse on that day,” Buck says. “And I’m talking about whether you’re walking, trotting, or cantering the horse. You’re going to take him through certain exercises [until] you know you’ve taken the horse as far as you can for that day.

"All of the basic movements of lateral flexion and movement are [can be] done on the end of a lead rope," says Buck. **"And of course, you do more with a greener horse and less and less as they get more experienced, but you check your horse out on the ground first to see if there's any problems in lateral movement before you'd get on."**

“Maybe on a given day, a leg yield would be the best you could do with proper flexion. Well then, to entertain the notion of doing a haunches in or a shoulders-in while you’re trotting would be unrealistic and you’re probably going to fail. So you

may hit that limit at the leg yield. If you don’t, you move on to the next more difficult exercise. So you think of planning out the ride day by day, week by week, month by month, [always] ending on something that is a little bit difficult for the horse, thinking you can get him just a little bit better.”

For example, say you are working on lateral movement

with collection at the walk and the trot.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to do it at the canter,” Buck says. “It may be that your goal at the canter is to lope forward in a calm way and on course on a loose rein because that might be the limit of what you and the horse can accomplish. And until you can lope a horse comfortably on a loose rein on course, gathering the horse, or collecting the horse—it’s a fantasy. So I often tell people until you can walk, trot, lope, and gallop a horse on a loose rein on course, to collect a horse is just a dream. Therefore pulling on the horse’s mouth before you’ve achieved that, you’re only pulling on the horse’s mouth because of insecurity or fear of falling off.”

Lateral movement also can be addressed in one’s ground-work, and it should be, according to Buck.

“All of the basic movements of lateral flexion and movement are [can be] done on the end of a lead rope,” he says. “And of course, you do more with a greener horse and less and less as they get more experienced, but you check your horse out on the ground first to see if there’s any problems in lateral movement before you’d get on. You check out those things on the ground; you check out the exact same movements when you get on the horse.

“And if those things do check out, and you confirm them as to be something that you can accomplish without any trouble in the horse—moving the hind right or left, the front right or left, and united both ends together—and you feel the reins are hooked down to the feet, then you can proceed from there. But if you check out those things and you cannot confirm them, then moving on to a higher level, you’re just going to get the horse in trouble.”

The importance of lateral work can hardly be overstated, according to Buck. In fact, he put its value this way:

“If you have no lateral flexion and lateral movement then probably before you get on your horse you should just key into your cell phone 9... 1...and then you can just have one more number to punch in and everything should be fine.

“Without lateral movement, you have no way of discovering whether or not your horse is even on all four corners, because if you move the hind-quarters, it’s a forward movement. If



Buck Brannaman in Kiowa, Colo. Photo by Mindy Bower.

you move the front quarters, his weight is over his hindquarters. If you move him laterally while going forward, that’s another forward movement. If you back him in circles, that’s another movement that has to be within balance in order to achieve it properly. All of those lateral movements involve you being able to find out, ‘Okay my horse needs a little help on this particular movement to achieve balance.’ When all those movements feel even, equal on both sides right to left, forward or backward, that’s the essence of getting the horse even on all four corners.”

Being unfamiliar with lateral work leaves a rider woefully unprepared to test to see if a horse is even on all four corners, according to Buck.

“Therefore anything you do with two reins when you go forward as far as collecting the horse is a guessing game,” he says. “You might get lucky or you might not. You don’t even know what to work on if you don’t try to move him laterally.

“Ray said something that particularly involved this one time to me. He said, ‘The only reason we ever bend a horse is to have some sort of influence on where his feet go.’

“Lateral flexion without movement is not relevant. And furthermore—I always thought this was kind of funny—Ray would say, ‘When you bend your horse, you’re not trying to direct his lips.’ And he’d leave it at that. That really tickled me when I heard that.”

Melanie Smith Taylor is a horsemanship clinician and a celebrated show jumper who won an Olympic Gold Medal representing the United States in 1984. She also is the author of the recently released book *Riding with Life: Lessons from the Horse*. For more on Melanie visit: www.taylormade-horsemanship.com

“Basically, the way I think about lateral work appears to be a contradiction,” Melanie Smith Taylor says. “But it’s true that lateral flexion is important because you have to ask the horse to be crooked to develop straightness. So that sounds like a paradox to people, but it is so important to work your horse off both sets of aids—right leg versus left leg, and right rein versus

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION



left rein—and then there are so many different combinations of aids to help them find their center of balance under the rider.”

Melanie always wants her horses to move away from the pressure of an aid in the lightest possible way. To get a horse proficient at this, it requires working on various lateral maneuvers like the leg yield, shoulder-in, haunches-in, and half-pass, she says.

“Really, none of these movements require special names,” she explains. “They’re just asking the horse to separate his parts and then move his parts together willingly and in a relaxed way. I think that’s the key thing, lightness but willing and relaxed.”

Working on this helps the horse develop the balance and equal coordination throughout his body.

“When your horse is attentive to your aids, the rider is able to help the horse more easily find his center when he goes off track momentarily, such as spooking away from something on the side or he doesn’t want to go near something in front of him such as a jump or a piece of ground or water he doesn’t want to cross,” Melanie says. “When he spooks, his body gets crooked, he looks away to the side, or he tries to swing his hind end one way or the other. If you’ve worked on your lateral exercises, moving your horse into a ‘crooked’ position (meaning with bend in his body), then you can use your opposing aids to bring him back to straightness, thus easily fixing these issues. It’s just a matter of being prepared. It’s looking ahead to what issues can come up and getting your horse responsive to you so you can take care of dangerous or unwanted situations.

Melanie stresses the importance of practicing moving the horse’s body over in increments, or over with extra bend, or over with less bend.

“You practice those movements so that you can quickly help your horse get straight again because only when a horse is straight is he centered and feeling his balance,” she says. “Balance to the horse is his number one primal instinct. He can be calm and relaxed when he’s in balance. And when he’s crooked, out of balance, and out of shape, that’s uncomfortable to the horse. He may not know why he’s uncomfortable, but he’s uncomfortable. So the rider can quickly help him find that place of comfort, that place of peace, that center, and help him find relaxation and confidence again.”

Melanie explains that it is important to be able to feel where the horse is under you.

“You address that question by when you ask your horse to, say, move off your right leg,” she explains. “Is it more difficult—does it take more pressure—than when you ask him to move off your left leg? That’s where you find there’s not equal coordination, equal response, on each side. That’s another reason lateral work is important is to be able to find out where your horse is less responsive

and the reason he’s likely to be unbalanced. He might be hard on one side. So if he’s heavy on the left rein and light on the right rein for instance, then most likely he’s a little concave on the right side and not filling up that right rein and he’s bent to the right and that’s putting more pressure on the left rein.

“The lateral work gives you a way to help your horse find his center, find his balance, find equal coordination and strength on both sides to help him be a better athlete. I’m always thinking about finding a way to help my horse maximize his athletic ability whether he jumps or whether he’s a trail horse—if he’s equal on both sides pushing evenly, all of that helps him be able to do his job, whatever it is, and stay sound and stay happy and stay relaxed.”

Lateral work can be done in groundwork as well as from the saddle, Melanie says.

“Working a horse on a circle and putting him into a drift is like a leg yield,” she explains, for example.

When asked if she uses lateral work in general when going



Melanie Taylor leg yielding Opal in and out on a circle.

about riding horses, Melanie answers:

“Constantly, because you’re constantly practicing. You’re always aware of your horse’s balance and his straightness. You’re always fixing, correcting. I’d never let something go unattended if I felt my horse get crooked or spook away from something. I’m either constantly doing a piece of lateral work to help him get straight or I’m using it as an exercise to practice having him move off my aids. I want him to be really pliable and flexible between my aids so I can move him in and out of his center, in and out of straightness, easily so that he is readily available to me.

“Even if I’m out on a trail in the woods I’m always aware of it and using lateral work in some way. To me, you’ve got to intersperse the longitudinal and lateral. Longitudinal is front to back, lateral is left to right, so I’m constantly interspersing those. Longitudinal work gives your horse adjustability through transitions which helps him find his balance. Lateral work as I’ve mentioned helps the horse find straightness. Like a Mocking Bird goes through his repertoire when he sings—I have this Mocking Bird outside my door when I’m working outside. He just has a whole repertoire he goes through. When I get on a horse, I go through a repertoire. I make sure I can move this foot this way, that foot that way, and different parts of the horse equally. I’m constantly aware of that throughout my ride.

“One day a horse might be a little stiff on the right and the next day he might be stiff on the left. He’s not going to be the same each day. I’m always aware of where my horse is and I work on what needs to be addressed that day. You always stay in the moment with the horse you have that day.”

Ellen Eckstein trains horses full time. She has her USDF silver and gold medals, by successfully competing through the Grand Prix level. She began working with Tom Dorrance in 1976, and it has become her life goal to combine the principles she learned from Tom into her dressage philosophy. She co-authored the book *Bringing It Together, an Approach to a Lighter Happier Dressage Horse* with Betty Staley. For more info visit: www.ellenecksteindressage.com.

“Lateral work is, I think, imperative for almost any discipline.” Ellen Eckstein says. “But a lot depends on how the lateral work is done. To gain the benefit the horse must learn to take big, loose steps sideways, and then forward and under. If the lateral work is forced, the horse will be tight. He won’t let go and may take short mincing steps, becoming tense and unhappy.”

Not incorporating lateral work into a daily riding program can mean a missed opportunity for the horse to carry himself



Ellen Eckstein riding a shoulder-in. Photo by Heartfoto.

and his rider more comfortably. It encourages a loose back and better balance, which in turn means the rider is going to be safer and the horse more relaxed mentally and physically, according to Ellen.

“Oftentimes without lateral work a horse will carry himself with a high head and a very tight back, whereas correct lateral work helps take care of those issues,” she says. “A very tense horse benefits tremendously from good lateral work. A spooky horse, the same thing.”

When asked about the benefits of starting some lateral work with a horse she is unfamiliar with, Ellen responds:

“It would tell me whether the horse is safe, whether the horse is tight in the back and hindquarters, and then, of course, mentally. If I pick up a rein and ask for a lateral movement and the horse either doesn’t move at all or moves the hindquarters in—there’s a brace in the hindquarters—that would tell me a lot. Before I considered a horse a really comfortable, safe horse to ride I would stress lateral work to eliminate any concern.

“To me, the bend in a horse corresponds to where its feet are landing. And if his feet are stuck and the hindquarters are braced to the inside, then there is no way to actually bend a horse. So you need the lateral movement to help the horse get to a proper bend which means helping him to get his feet landing in the right place under his body.”

Ellen utilizes lateral work every day in her horse work.

“When I get on a horse the first time that day, part of my warm-up would be walking on a loose rein, and then gathering the horse, reaching for him, seeing that he can yield and turn. So it’s part of the warm-up for anything regardless of whether it be on the trail or in the arena. It’s important to me to have that feeling all the time—to be able to get that nice big relaxed and comfortable movement.”

When asked what advice regarding lateral work Ellen has



for riders who may not be familiar with it, she says:

“Number one, it’s very important. Number two, I think it needs to be done with the proper feel and the horse should not be forced sideways by the rider’s legs and driving seat. That can tighten the rib cage which in turn shuts off the feet and makes it difficult for the horse to take those large loose steps with the hind legs. Often in this scenario, the rider is leaning as he tried to push the horse sideways. That ends up unbalancing a horse rather than helping him get in balance.”

Forty years ago Ellen met a man who profoundly changed her understanding of many aspects of horsemanship for the better, including her approach to lateral work.

“Back in 1976 when I met Tom Dorrance I was riding my leg yields by pushing the body of the horse,” she

explains. “In all my lateral work I was pushing the body of the horse, and then I learned from Tom how to ride the feet sideways, and it’s a totally different feel than trying to push the horse over. And it makes an entirely different type of lateral work. I have found through my teaching that it really isn’t that difficult for even fairly novice riders to learn how to do some lateral work in such a way that the horse gets loose and relaxed rather than gets tighter.”

So, how did Ellen with Tom Dorrance’s help come to a understand how to present lateral work differently to the horse?

“Well, one of the major things that I think Tom started to help me with when I first was working with him was how when you reach for your horse, the hind feet should come to life,” she says. “And then also how when a foot is in the air you can set it down; you can swing it. By starting with picking up an inside rein and having the hind leg start to come to life and start to move sideways in the beginning and then be able to also adjust the front steps as they’re moving...and Tom really stressed in lateral work that the horse always keeps the exact same amount of weight on all four feet at all times. So, if the horse is going sideways, say you were doing a leg yield, the horse should have the same amount of weight on his right feet as he has on his left feet.”

Ellen also stresses that lateral work is equally important for the trail horse as well as the dressage horse, the jumping horse, or any horse.

“Because it helps the horse become balanced,” she says. “An unbalanced horse is often a troubled horse no matter where you are—on a trail, on the beach, in the arena. If the horse feels

out of balance, then he is bothered. Good lateral work teaches the horse how to balance himself. I would want any horse to have a certain amount of balance before I would ride him on the trail.

“I have some very successful endurance riders who work with me, and they have gotten to the point where they feel that it is absolutely vital for them to prepare their horses for endurance rides [with lateral work] because they want to have them completely balanced evenly on all four feet totally on

their own. If the horse is not balanced when they come in for their vet checks [during a competition], the horse is more likely to have a higher heart rate and their backs can be sore because they have been carrying their heads high. When they have done really correct lateral

"Everybody wants to do the tricks but some people don't understand why they do something [lateral maneuvers]," says Jim. "I feel like it is important for people to understand what the horse needs out of the deal to do these things. That's understanding how they're designed..."

work, they come in, heart rate is low, they are carrying themselves in a way that they are swinging their backs so they're not sore.

“No matter what you do with your horse, everybody wants their horse to be calm and relaxed and balanced.”

Jim Hicks teaches horsemanship clinics worldwide and co-owns Sage Creek Equestrian in Heber City, Utah, with his wife, Donette. He specializes in bringing dressage principles to horsemen of any discipline. For more on Jim visit: www.sagecreekequestrian.com.

When asked what the importance of lateral work is to horsemanship, Jim Hicks says:

“It’s not a simple concept. Everybody wants to do the tricks but some people don’t understand why they do something [lateral maneuvers]. I feel like it is important for people to understand what the horse needs out of the deal to do these things. That’s understanding how they’re designed. That’s understanding the different muscle groups and how that works for them... and then it’s the rider’s responsibility to figure out how these things apply to the horse. There are a lot of people who can move their horse sideways and do what they think is correct lateral movement, but then there’s a whole part of it they’re missing.”

Refining every aspect of one’s feel and timing, and establishing clarity in the different things one wishes to communicate with a horse, are key in accomplishing specific lateral movements, according to Jim.

“Basically the movements,” Jim explains, “leg yield, shoulder-in, haunches in, haunches out—the correct term for haunches in is travers and the correct term for haunches out is renvers—and half-pass, what these lateral movements do is they work to develop the different aspects of the muscling groups and different aspects of the horse. So if you are able to incorporate the lateral work into your horse, it doesn’t matter if he’s a cow horse, a jumping horse, a dressage horse, there’s not any horse on the planet that can’t benefit from it because you’re actually using these different movements to work different muscle groups to help create more flexibility. Basically, what everybody wants in the end is mobility. The ability to move or be moved with freedom and ease.”

It is important to introduce lateral work to a horse who is unfamiliar with it in a way that they feel confident about it versus feeling overwhelmed or overburdened, Jim stresses. This is especially a concern with a young horse.

“Just as much as you have that much influence over the things that you want your horse to accomplish, you have to become that disciplined in your thinking and in your timing as a rider as well so that you and your horse can communicate in a partnership,” Jim says. “There’s a conversation, whether it’s an upper-level dressage horse or a bridle horse, there’s this conversation about self-carriage. In order for that to be developed over time in a productive way there are some biomechanical necessities that the horse has in order to gymnasticise them, help them become equal from one side to the other, from front to back, and all of your lateral work complements that in one form or another.”

Developing this overall balance when riding a horse is essential to getting a horse performing at his best.

“As far as the benefit of doing the lateral work, if it’s done with correctness and thoughtfulness, it is going to result in horses developing the correct gymnastic ability as well as correct muscling. And when that occurs, that’s when you get true self-carriage coming from the hind-quarters over the horse’s back through the neck to the bridle.

“Ray Hunt transformed my life because he did get me to see things from the horse’s perspective—getting them to turn loose in their minds and that was powerful for me. But I also have come to realize that the biomechanical aspect of it sometimes is confronting or overwhelming to people, or it’s even kind of a negative term.

But how I look at it is it’s like if you’re training for an athletic endeavor. Your mind might be in the right place to do whatever it is that you’re choosing to do, but then you need to do certain types of physical work in your own body so that your mind and body can complement each other in the pursuit of that.

“I think sometimes what happens with the horse is, there’s mental pathology and physical pathology, and so the mental pathology is, ‘the horse is braced.’ It is something that the human has put in there. We’ve created a resistance. And then there’s the physical pathology which is the muscle memory, how the horse has been ridden, or how they use themselves. When horses are standing out there on their own, they handle themselves in the best manner that they see suitable for them. When we involve the rider in the situation, we complicate it for them.”



Jim Hicks half pass right.



Comfort Is Just A Few Inches Away

By Chris Sobenes

Young riders don't need to spend a lot of time preparing to ride... but my older riders really benefit by spending some time getting their body ready to do the right thing in the saddle. It takes a lot of core strength to keep your body aligned, shoulders over hips, so you can do all this work with your legs. If you use these exercises, you'll see results, making life more comfortable for you and your horse.

Even a little thing like trying to keep your toe and heel level for any length of time makes a big difference to your horse. There is just a little bit of difference in how you're holding your leg around your horse in a good way or a bad way. These exercises help you get that muscle memory so when you get astride your horse, it's comfortable and so are you. These three exercises are simple things that a novice rider, or a rider who spends a lot of time behind a desk, can do when they are off the horse to prepare for a better ride. The exercises don't take long, but the benefits to your riding will be long-lasting.

Exercise #1 - Toe Lift

Start by finding a place where you can hold onto something for balance. Put all your weight on one foot and lift the other off the ground. Start by having your foot in a neutral position (A.) and then, contract your shin muscle to lift your toe (B.). You should feel a stretch in your calf muscle as you do this.

Why? To ride in proper position so you can move with your horse. So many novice riders want to ride with their toe down. Instead of telling my students to put their heel down, I tell them to lift their toe up. Then their heel will relax in the stirrup. That simple exercise of lifting the toe and stretching the calf muscle in the back is something that a lot of people have a really hard time with. I tell them to get used to riding with their toe slightly lifted. It will help the heel relax. After riding with this exaggerated lift, eventually they'll be able to get to keep their foot level instead of pushing their toe down.



Exercise #2 - Hip Rotation

Start with your leg slightly off the ground with your foot level and facing forward (A.). In image (B.) you can see I've rotated from my hip socket so that my foot is out at about a 45 degree angle. The leg stays relatively straight, but the hip rotates out as if in a riding position.

Why? To sit on your seat bones and be centered with your heel underneath your hip. I find it very beneficial for men in particular because they tend to be more muscle bound and therefore tight in their hips. Many new riders end up pinching in their knees which makes it quite difficult for them to rotate their legs out to be in good riding form (on the center seam of their jeans). Riders mistakenly lift from the knee, when they try to get good hip to heel alignment. Instead they need to rotate out at the hip socket, not by drawing their heel back toward their hind cinch. This is a simple way to build the muscle memory to be able to rotate from the hip. This helps you sit centered in what Buck calls position 2. If you are sitting with your knees in, you can't sit in position 2. You will be forward ALL the time.



Exercise #3 - Hip Flexor

This is the hardest of the three exercises because it works your outside oblique hip-flexor which is a bigger muscle and it takes quite a bit more balance. Stand as straight as you can as centered as you can be (A.). Lift your leg out to the side (B. - D.). When I lift I swing almost like I'm going to kick a soccer ball. Lift your leg out to the side and then you swing slightly forward. You want to come forward, because if you came in even with your other leg you would have a tendency to let your heel come up and then your shoulder falls forward. (You don't want your hip to be a fulcrum where you wind up being like a teeter totter and your pivot point is at your hip.)

Why? To be able to properly put energy into your leg. When you tell someone to put some energy in their leg to tell their horse to go forward, or go from a walk to a trot, they have to open their leg to create a bubble of air between their saddle and their thigh, and then if they need to, they will need to collapse their leg onto their horse to kick, from the knee down. If you have to sit on your seat bones and open your legs... that is a really difficult thing. New people, when they come to ride, they look at me like I've lost my mind when I ask them to do this, because it's not a usual way to use your leg. They've never done that before, so again, you're building a muscle memory to make it familiar.



The Gang – Left to Right -Pat Gleeson, Curtis and Lee Vossler, Craig and Camille Reesor, Steve Haines, Greg Garvie, Jane Angeles, Patti Dunne and Bryan Neubert

By Pat Gleeson

“Let’s see what you got,” said in Bryan’s enthusiastic and inimitable style. Thus begins 5 days of an adventure discovering what you really have got at a Bryan Neubert home clinic last October.

A little different than previous years when I have been there in May/June. The home clinics lend themselves to smaller groups, which also means you can get a lot done and gain some very valuable information. We had a wonderful group of 7 and with me that made it 8. Five of those guys were from over the border in Alberta, Canada, and were ranchers there, so most things are done horseback. This gave Bryan the opportunity to relate a lot of information about horsemanship in a ranch situation and provide stories and examples of when he was cowboying. This had my radar on high alert soaking up all the information that Bryan provided, as a ranching environment can set a horse up for life with regard to responsiveness and exposure to many and varied scenarios.

We had colt starting in the morning and our 5 Canadians had all brought a horse to start. Day one with these guys to be started was fairly straightforward and the horses responding nicely. Bryan commended the group when it was time to go catch their horses after he had flagged them around the arena and then brought them into the round corral. He asked the colt starters to catch their horses. Now rather than every man for himself, these guys stepped back and assisted each other in gaining the horse’s attention and allowing each person to catch their horse before another commenced the process. Common sense you may say, but go to clinics and just see what happens when the clinician says “go catch your horse.” Yes, people actually make the process harder for themselves and their horses by just barging in and scattering horses about!

Day 2 the colt starters had their horses saddled. One particular horse was not too keen with the saddle and Bryan related the story on a difficult horse he had and the suggestion Tom Dorrance gave regarding once it stops bucking take the saddle off and go back and repeat the process in an hour and continue until that horse realizes it doesn’t need to buck. With this particular horse he was concerned about that saddle, but once you stepped up in the saddle there was no problem and no indication of wanting to hump up. Snaffle bits were not used initially, but rather the halter. Bryan stated that he prefers to tie up the end of the rope to the halter so that you now have a set of reins rather than have to flip the lead rope from one side to the other. It is logical because you can support the horse quickly if required and draw the face back and forth if need be to assist the horse in understanding moving forward. There are other techniques and suggestions that Bryan made, but they are best to experience firsthand. Needless to say, by day 4 the colts were in the arena and had snaffle bits and by day 5 they even had exposure to tracking cattle.

The afternoon is horsemanship. Now travelling from Australia I cannot bring a horse, so Bryan kindly lets me use one of his. This year I had a green broke mare with about 20 to 25 rides on her. I carried out some groundwork with this horse in the morning just to see where she was at and try a couple of moves to experiment how I could have her looking to me. Bryan does like to encourage experimenting with thoughts and ideas and refers to Tom also being strong on encouraging this approach. I was looking forward to our ride that afternoon.

The afternoon I saddled up and stepped up into the saddle. Having gained knowledge and confidence through my other clinics with Bryan I could test out and see what this mare knew. I should have known!! This mare may be green broke to Bryan’s thinking, but for others, they would have been surprised just how much was there. It also meant that what Bryan had shown at other home clinics I attended had sunk in and when I asked from this little mare, I got, even down to spins!! Having said



that, she still needed support and guidance in keeping straight. It was interesting to note that once she found that I could control her feet and that I remained consistent in what I asked, she relaxed that much more. So the horsemanship for me was getting better and refining what I had learnt plus adding more to the toolkit. Everyone else was pushing and challenging for more information and could demonstrate that they were ready for more. This just makes Bryan grin and further heightens his enthusiasm and more is delivered. Bryan can give you and show you so much, but it is measured to where that person may be at with their experience and knowledge. Sensible approach to have, in order to provide a quality experience for all. I could go into minute detail on all the maneuvers we accomplished and little exercises we undertook to strengthen a knowledge base that we can use with all horses, however, it would fill a book and take away from you, the reader, the opportunity to go and experience it for yourself.

One other thing I might add, some of the learning that will occur, will not be at the clinic, but weeks later when you get home and are working with your own horse. That is when the lightbulb comes on and you say to yourself "oh that is what he meant" or something similar. So, don't come along with expectations that you will learn everything you need to know or that you will "get" everything you think you need. It will happen with time. Rather, go with a truly open mind and be extremely observant and by all means ask the supposed silly questions. It may not sink in there, but it will filter through later when you are home.

Now Bryan is also a great storyteller and the stories are both entertaining and informative. In colt starting he will break to tell a story that relates to what was just being practiced by the group. There is a method and I'll add timing with these stories. It gives the horse a break and time to soak on what has just occurred. It gives the humans that break just to relax, yet at the same time clarifies the learning process. This also happens in Horsemanship and many times you will see the "penny drop" for one participant who will then undoubtedly try the move again and reach success. So, there is method to his madness and Neubertisms!

Riding out on Bryan's ranch in Alturas gave all attendees the opportunity to see how their horses responded to being out of the arena. It's also a great opportunity to ride a varied and changing terrain and help the horse look to you for direction, pace and speed. We watched Bryan move cattle with his dog and then we all had the opportunity to hold the herd and cut cattle

on a hillside and then move the cut herd back along a road and headed down to the arena for more cattle work tomorrow. When you are out in that environment and you hear from Bryan "good work," or "I like your thinking," as you set up cows ready to cut, it always makes one feel like one has achieved and can demonstrate that the lessons learned in the arena have been digested and come to the fore out in a pasture moving cows.

Speaking of digesting, Patty Neubert puts on a lunch each day that is not only delectable, but makes you feel like you are at home with mom's cooking. It is just another touch that provides you with a welcoming feeling. Lunchtime is also a great time to hear other stories from Bryan that not only enthrall you, but inspire you.

Bryan and Patty open up their home to clinic attendees and provide a camping area with facilities and stalls for your horse and a plentiful supply of hay and water. Groups for the home clinic are kept to a small number, thus allowing a greater opportunity to learn and clarify and show Bryan "what you got." It is always a pleasure when he looks at you and says "Let's see what you got," the challenge is always accepted because whether you could demonstrate the move or not, there is encouragement and words of advice that take you further in becoming a better horseman.

It is not only the horsemanship that draws me back time and again to a Neubert home clinic, there is a lot more to it than that including humility and humbleness in its true form from both Patty and Bryan. To be immersed in that environment really does help put a perspective on how you conduct yourself with others, livestock and with horses. You get a lot more than you expect if you are open enough and observant.

I travel halfway around the world to be at Bryan and Patty's home because every experience with them is worth its weight in gold. That should indicate to you how worthy it is to go and experience a home clinic with Bryan. Be prepared to challenge yourself, be prepared to be open to learning, demonstrate your desire to improve and broaden your horizons and he will give you what you need in spades. So, if you have ever thought about attending, now is the time to put those thoughts into action. It takes me well over 8000 miles to get there, but the journey is the price to reach an amazing destination. I am happy to pay the price because I leave with so much more each time!



FEAR

by Terry Church Photos by Iga Opanowicz

Fear is an emotion I have often felt and observed in others. In looking up its definition, I was most intrigued by the phrase, “a feeling of anxiety concerning the outcome of something.” While those of us who work around horses sometimes find ourselves in dangerous situations, like being run away with, getting bucked off, or being intimidated by the size and power of our equine counterpart, I believe most of our day-to-day concerns have less to do with actual threats than with our anticipation of potentially unwanted outcomes. These worries can become magnified if we are in an environment where others see (and judge) how we work with our horse. For me, fears incurred by non-threatening events are more subtle, insidious, and those I am often not openly aware of — in fact, there was a time when I didn’t recognize them as fear at all.

For example, I used to begin working with a horse expecting him to give me his full attention at the outset. For me, it was not only imperative for my safety, but it had been my experience that you couldn’t accomplish anything without it. So if my horse didn’t respond to me, I would insist, becoming heavier-handed. If that didn’t work, anger would rise up and a battle would ensue. Picking a fight only brought out defensiveness in return, but that didn’t stop me from thinking my horse’s behavior unnecessary, silly, or dim-witted, all the while trying to force him to keep his mind on what I wanted him to. Just get over it, was my attitude, so I can get on with your training. (You know, the important stuff.)

At the time, I didn’t equate my domineering manner with fear. By the same token, I didn’t equate the horse’s inattention with fear either. I simply justified my actions by listening to those around me who said that horses distracted themselves on purpose as a form of “resistance,” implying they “knew better” but enjoyed doing the opposite just to get their own way. But after being shown a better approach that didn’t require me to blame the horse for reacting in ways I was ultimately responsible for, my defensiveness began to fade. For the first time I could see underneath my emotional armor, an armor that had become so commonplace I no longer recognized its presence inside myself. That’s when I knew. My anger was a mask, or better yet, a defense against fear. When I wasn’t afraid of the horse itself, I was afraid of not having the right answers to the dilemmas he presented.

Major revelation number two was that I was ashamed of not knowing the “answer” just as I was ashamed of being afraid for my physical safety. Not having all the answers meant that I was a failure while the phrase “fear is for sissies” had been drilled



The face of distraction.

into my head since the age of four. Both types of fear were the result of a lack of confidence, 1) in my intelligence, and 2) in my physical capabilities. No wonder, then, fear had been hard for me to admit. Every time I felt uncertain, the discomfort of my shame simply made it more relieving to blame the horse.

Once I could openly admit that I didn't have all the answers and that having all the answers wasn't required in order to be a good horseman, I began to lose the need to lay blame at all. Instead I began to see a horse's inattention as a form of fear and, like mine, not always the kind that arises from an actual threat. A horse with chronic inattention is operating from a habit of anticipating an unwanted outcome, just as I had been. Their emotional conflict prohibits them from knowing how to relax and settle, just as mine had.

Once I saw the correlation, my ensuing compassion led me to the idea that if I showed the horse the object of their distraction or fear, they'd "get over it." While it can work just this easily in some cases, for many horses it's not enough — but I had to learn the hard way and went through another phase of prodding and goading in an effort to make them "go up and look at the thing" or "just stand and get used to that noise in the neighbor's yard" so they could hurry up and get over their anxiety so that I could feel safe. What I usually ended up with was a horse who not only remained distracted but mistrustful of me as well. In addition, my actions did nothing for the horse who just seemed out of sorts or upset by the world for no apparent reason that I could tell.

At some point I gained enough experience to discern a horse's inherent ability to resolve his own fear. By then it had become clear to me that while I might be able to coerce him to comply physically, I could not force him to relax mentally in a tense situation. This he must learn to do for himself and only then would I have a horse who had the capacity to offer me his attention without being conflicted by other distractions (major revelation number three). To enable this to happen, I had to become



This horse may not look afraid per se, yet he carries himself in a way that exhibits chronic tension.

someone he could rely on so that he would not feel a need to "leave" me mentally or to "take over" physically in order to save his own skin. In the process of learning to facilitate an environment within which that psychological process could take place, fear for my own safety lessened dramatically because I had taken the pressure off myself to try to fix him. It was no longer up to me to "gut it out" while placing myself in a compromising situation beyond my skill level. It was up to me to be more educated about how I could arrange my sessions to allow my horse to work out his fear in a way that was appropriate to my skill level.

It has helped me a great deal to understand that a horse's uneasiness is coming from either a lack of confidence within himself, with his surroundings, or with the person — or some combination of these three areas. Learning to discern which ones are an issue can be a great tool for learning how to not take their actions personally. Emotional detachment is vital for gaining clarity when observing how and when to give support and direction, and when to step back and let the horse be a horse (i.e., stop trying to tell him what to do.)

These days, when I start out working with a horse, I no longer need or expect him to give me his full attention right away, the key word being "full." I have learned that a horse is always aware of my presence, even when he appears distracted or fixated on something in the other direction. Still, his concern can develop into a big reaction if I don't find a way of interacting with him that helps him feel confident enough to let it go and to settle. So in the beginning, I refrain from asking him for anything complicated, but just enough to remind him that I am currently the lead-mare in our herd of two, and that I will show him a way to safety. It may be something as simple as a turn or change of direction, a simple circle or wavy line — not enough to further provoke him, but just enough to remind him that I am there to support and direct.



Two Thoroughbreds working together in a round pen.

There are countless ways to interact with a horse that allow him to work out his own various

forms of fear (i.e., distractions, inattentiveness, resistance, tension, or bracing) while under saddle or from the ground. While I can't speak to every one of them here, I feel strongly that the foundation to establishing the kind of communication and understanding that can help a horse and its person overcome fear of all kinds begins with free-work. If done mindfully, free-work within a clearly delineated parameter, such as a round pen or arena, allows for a wide variety of interactions from passive observation to full engagement. Because of its tendency to elicit observation, it provides an entry point for those at any skill level to learn what they are ready for. It can be demonstrated for another's benefit, executed with one or more individuals and horses, and tailored to address most any issue, especially those of nervous horses and novice horsemen who need to build confidence and competence. The understanding, feel and timing acquired from this activity can then be transferred to groundwork on a line and ultimately to work under saddle.

Of course, just like anything else, free-work can be overused, abused, drilled and manipulated to wear a horse down rather than allow him to have a change of heart. Here are some questions I like to ask myself when looking for a good free-worker who can address a horse's issues such as fear: Can he or she explain why they're doing what they're doing? Can they admit mistakes and point out the effect, positive or negative, they're having on the horse? Can they be soft and quiet as well as firm when they need to be? Do they express compassion for the horse and the person they're instructing or do they have a punitive, judgmental attitude? Do they demonstrate patience and the ability to allow for a better response to develop within the horse rather than always trying to make something specific happen? Do they focus on "tricks" or the quality of the horse's demeanor? Are they effective in moving in the direction of their goal for that session and are they satisfied with and rewarding of positive changes along the way? And do the horse and the person end up softer and more relaxed than when they began?



After being allowed to work out their relationship with each other, these two Thoroughbreds can accept direction from the person (unseen, standing in the center) in a relaxed and easy manner.



The end of a good free-working session.



Transferring relaxation skills from the round pen to the line.



Where Is The Middle?

By Wendy Murdoch

The horse must be shown through training how to carry the weight of a rider. This weight-bearing posture is not innate to the horse. It must be taught, developed and strengthened for him to perform with ease. Falsely some say they are simply asking the horse to do what he does naturally.

However, the correct weight-bearing posture differs greatly to that of the horse in the field because of the presence of a rider on his back and the length of time he is asked to bear that weight. If we are to truly take the horse's well-being into consideration we must look at our contact, not just with the hands but more importantly with our seat.

The terms and phrases often used to describe the horse's mouth include "a soft feel," light (vs. heavy), quiet (vs. chomping), closed (vs. gaping), "packing the bit," wet (vs. dry), having "lipstick foam" on the lips, and soft chewing to name a few. Descriptions of the rider whose horse has a good mouth is said to have "good hands," "light hands" and/or "independent hands."

Competitions in "lightness" have sprung up which reward riders for how little they use the reins. In many cases, instead of judging the horse's overall physical development and quality of movements, poor musculature and circus tricks are ignored in favor of looped reins, bitless and bridleless performances. Oddly, using the same criteria of "lightness," western curb bits are now seen being ridden with two hands and continuous rein tension, which is a contradiction to the function of this type of bit and the heritage of western riding.

The United States Dressage Federation (USDF) rules only permit a snaffle bit at the lower levels of competition, a bit that is more than 3000 years old and designed to be ridden with tension on both reins. In ancient times the reins were attached to



Drawings from the 1700's illustrate a cavesson as part of the horse's headgear. In many cases there was a lead attached to the center ring going to the rider's hand.



the rider's body, leaving his hands free to use a bow and arrow. The inclusion of a chinstrap on a snaffle bit is a very recent adaptation. The chinstrap is necessary to prevent the snaffle from being pulled through the horse's mouth when using one rein at a time. The vaquero tradition may use a snaffle bit to start a horse or go directly to the bosal, two rein (bosal and spade bit) and finally to contact only on the spade bit.

Upper-level dressage horses are ridden in a "full" or "double bridle" comprising of two bits: a curb, typically shorter shanked than a Western curb bit, and a "bradoon," a small thin snaffle. The amount of rein tension varies greatly depending on the style of dressage (classical vs. sport) and type of training.

As with all things, one rarely hears about those who go about their business in the horse world using ethical practices and quiet, progressive training programs. Recently sport dressage has come under scrutiny and been steeped in tremendous controversy over a technique called "rollkur" where the horse is ridden extremely deep and behind the vertical while being driven strongly forward. This technique not only dominates the horse mentally, it can destroy him physically. Yet Rollkur is not new or limited to dressage. Images from the late 1800's depict horses with chins on their chests and currently Rollkur (although not called by that name) is an accepted training practice for Western Pleasure and Reining horses, yet no outcry like that in the Dressage world can be heard.

Headgear isn't inherently "bad" or a "gimmick" and one should be cautious to judge another based on the equipment they use. I am not saying there aren't horse people who use equipment to force the horse into submission. But that same equipment, in the right hands, may be a valuable "tool" or an "aid" in the education of the horse. The snaffle bit can communicate information or be a torture device if pulled by one rein through the horse's mouth.

Nosebands have become controversial but have been around since man started riding horses. Engravings made on bone or antler dating back to 14,000 – 10,000 BC depict horse heads with some type of bridle consisting of a noseband. Drawings from the 1700's illustrate a cavason as part of the horse's headgear. In many cases there was a lead attached to the center ring going to the rider's hand. [Image 1a & b].

The Spaniards arrived in the Americas with the cavason, which evolved into the bosal. The term bosal is derived from the Spanish word bozal meaning "muzzle." As with any piece of equipment, it is important that a bosal fits properly because it can put pressure on the horse's skull and the sensitive area under the jaw. It is interesting to note that horses are unable to yawn while wearing a bosal, and even the bosalita used with a spade bit restricts the horse from opening his mouth, thereby acting as a noseband.

Since the industrial revolution, according to Udo Burger in *A Way to Perfect Horsemanship*, nosebands were used to prevent

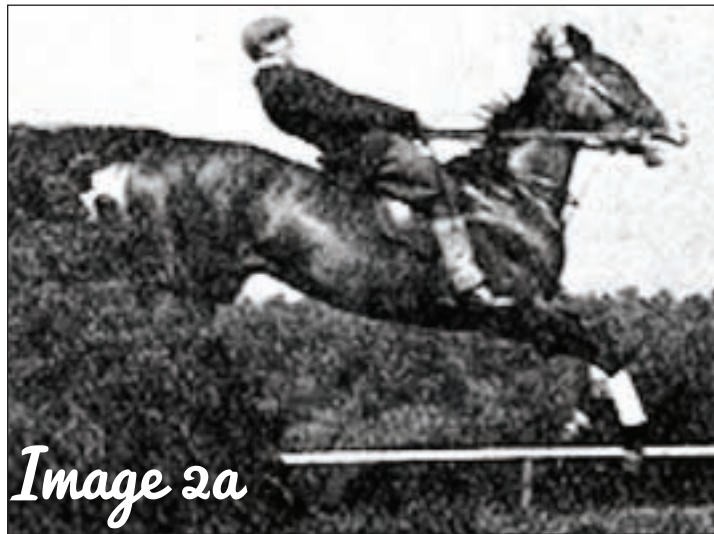


Image 2a



Image 2b

Leaning back over fences, vs. the "forward" seat introduced in the late 1800's.

horses from having their jaw broken when jumping. Riders would lean back over fences while maintaining pressure on the reins causing the horses to open the mouth. The backward style (leaning back over fences) did not change until Captain Frederico Caprilli developed the "forward" seat in the late 1800's. [Image 2 a & b] This was a vast improvement for the horse, as the rider could move his hands forward over fences thus releasing the reins over a jump.

When a noseband is properly adjusted one can place two stacked fingers between the horse's jaw and the leather under the chin. Too loose and the horse could get his tongue over the bit, which then bangs on his bars. Well-adjusted, it acts as a supportive aid to prevent the horse from evading the bit. Overly tightened, it clamps the horse's mouth shut. Therefore it is not the noseband but how it is adjusted that is important. Like a noseband, every piece of equipment we use with horses can be properly or improperly used.

Image 3a

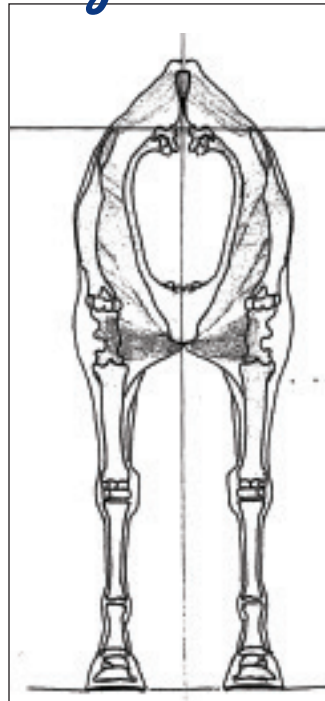


Image 3b



By far the most common cause of abuse is unintentional due to the rider's ignorance rather than purposefully trying to inflict harm. Today the equine industry as a whole lacks the knowledge, education, and training required to put the horse on the aids and into the correct posture capable of carrying the rider's weight. The poor posture seen today in horses of all breeds, all disciplines, in the name of lightness, beauty and/or tradition is far more damaging to the horse's health and well-being.

Ironically, in the past two decades we seem to be going backwards in regard to what we put on the horse's head, moving away from bits and more toward some type of noseband. Many riders think a bit is "bad" and will only use a halter or bitless bridle. To this end one can see lead ropes swinging violently while attached to the halter by a metal clip, which bangs the horse's sensitive jawbone. Yet this is considered kind! How long would you tolerate someone hitting you in the shin with a hammer?

Bitless bridles utilize nose pressure. There are a wide variety of styles, but the more common type tightens around the horse's face and does not slide when the rider slackens the reins. Thus the mouth is forced closed and remains restricted long after the rider lets go.

This trend is going even further toward riding on a completely loose rein, no reins, no bit, or no bridle. While this is a good exercise as a means of developing confidence, some riders regard themselves as "better" with the illusion that this is kinder to the horse than using that "evil" bit. But what about the horse's back?

The idea that we should not inflict pain to the horse's sensitive mouth is well intentioned and good. We want the horse to trust our contact and we do not want to abuse or "break his trust." We do need to take responsibility for our hands and the horse's mouth; however, the focus needs to go far beyond.

You can release the horse's mouth any time by yielding the reins, but as long as you are sitting on your horse you cannot give up your seat. Thus your seat has far more contact and influence on the horse than your hands will ever have. A secure seat and fluid hips is essential for clear, precise, effective communication with your horse, not the other way around. The rider's job, if he wants to be a good horseman or -woman, is to strive for a good seat, which translates into good hands.

A good seat and fluid hips allow the horse to swing his hind leg deeply underneath the rider's weight. This good engagement of the hind leg, at a minimum with the hind foot stepping into the print of the fore foot, creates the necessary upward thrust lifting the rib cage, saddle and rider. The upper ribs rise (withers area), provided the horse engages the thoracic sling muscles, which raise the front of the saddle, shifting the rider's weight back. Just as you would place your hand at either end of a stick to shape it into a bow, some form of contact at the front is

When the fore hoof is on the ground the front leg acts like a column. The horse's shoulder, being part of that column, cannot drop unless he breaks his leg. It feels like the horse has dropped his shoulder because of rib cage rotation relative to that front leg. Physically the shoulder is higher, but the saddle, being strapped to the rib cage, is relatively lower on that downwardly rotated side.

needed to create this shape between the shoulders because the horse does not have a collarbone. (See my *Anatomy of a Good Seat Reader*.)

If the horse does not engage the thoracic sling on both sides, he will be on the forehand. Engaging only one side causes the rib cage to rotate, evidenced by the withers or saddle horn pointing at an angle. When the rib cage rotates, riders are often told the horse has "dropped his shoulder" but this is anatomically impossible.

When the fore hoof is on the ground the front leg acts like a column. The horse's shoulder, being part of that column, cannot drop unless he breaks his leg. It feels like the horse has dropped his shoulder because of rib cage rotation relative to that front leg. Physically the shoulder is higher, but the saddle, being strapped to the rib cage, is relatively lower on that downwardly rotated side. [Image 3 a & b]

You cannot "pick your horse's shoulder up" because it hasn't dropped. You cannot make your horse "lift his shoulder," either, for the same reason. Lifting the rein has no real bearing on the horse's shoulder because the rein is attached to the horse's mouth. Lifting the rein more likely causes you to sit back so that you aren't leaning forward over that "dropped shoulder," thus unweighting that front leg.

With proper training you can teach your horse to engage the thoracic sling equally, thus lifting the rib cage between the shoulders. Or you can spur him in the ribs near the girth to



make him engage the sling on the low side; however, this is likely to create a brace in the ribs and restrict the horse's breathing. Imagine what it feels like to have someone poke you in the ribs!

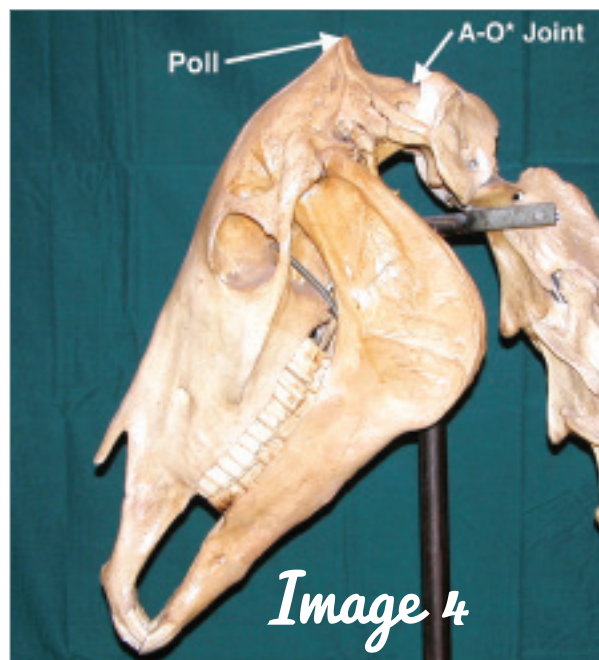
When the thoracic sling engages, the withers rise. This lifts the base of the neck, allowing it to lengthen. The muscles on the underside of the neck relax because the chest is no longer dropping down between the front legs. Muscles attached to the sternum and shoulder are connected to the horse's tongue through the hyoid apparatus. This means there is a direct connection from the chest to the mouth.

As the withers rise, the under-neck muscles relax because the weight of the chest is no longer dropping downward. The jaw, upper neck and tongue soften. The horse can flex at the atlanto-occipital joint where the skull meets the spine, which brings the plane of the horse's face toward the vertical. There is no joint at the poll, which is a bony projection between the horse's ears (image 4). Flexion at the atlanto-occipital joint is referred to as "poll flexion," although anatomically incorrect.

If there is no limit in front (contact of some kind), the horse drops down through the shoulders, stiffening the neck for balance. He will brace his neck out and down or raise his head up and back to counter the rider's weight. Both put his weight onto his forehead, dropping the withers down. Going onto the forehead increases the pressure onto the horse's front legs, creating a brace and potentially causing damage to ligaments, tendons and bone.

Downward pressure of the weight of the rider and/or saddle causes the horse to brace his back at the very least and exhibit fight or flight behavior at the very worst. Most horses learn to tolerate the pain, which persists as long as the horse is under saddle. The sensory nerves that feel pain deaden after about 20 minutes of continuous pressure. Typically riders will say it takes about 20 minutes for the horse to "warm up" and then he's fine, which indicates the horse no longer feels the pain. Tissue damage occurs where there is 5 lbs of pressure or greater. Hair follicles die, leaving white hair or hair loss in that area. Therefore, giving up the reins does not alleviate the horse's greatest potential source of discomfort - the rider's seat. Riding bareback does not necessarily improve the situation, as the weight of the rider is concentrated through her seat bones on the horse's back; however, proper saddle fit is essential to distribute the rider's weight to less than 5 lbs of pressure in any one place.

A good rider allows the horse to step through from behind and makes contact in front to shape the horse's spine into a weight-bearing posture. This shape is beneficial because the back is significantly stronger when rounded and also shifts weight to the horse's hindquarters, thus alleviating the front legs. Analogies to describe this posture are that of a bridge or a strung bow. The weight-bearing strength is a function of the spine rounding (longitudinal flexion).



* **A-O = Alanto-Occipital** The horse can flex at the atlanto-occipital joint where the skull meets the spine.

The horse needs to be able to lift the back to carry the weight of the rider effectively. Remember, horses do not have a collar-bone. The rib cage is slung between the pillars of the front legs. Training is required to strengthen the thoracic sling muscles into a weight-bearing posture (raised). Downward pressure, poor saddle fit, stiff hips, braced legs will all cause the horse to drop the rib cage down, thereby putting the weight onto the horse's forehead. Fitness (delay of fatigue) in the weight-bearing posture takes time to develop. Learned coordination and fitness are required in order to hold this posture for long periods of time, especially in more advanced movements.

The purpose of any type of bridle is to create a bow through the horse, which develops his ability to lift his back under the rider. If the horse is not shown how to do this from the beginning, it will be much more difficult to retrain. Therefore throwing the horse away in the early stages of his career instead of supporting him and showing him how to lift his back will set the stage for his entire riding career.

Watching someone perform riding bridleless can be a beautiful expression of correct self-carriage and partnership. It is just as admirable as someone in a double bridle or spade bit when the horse is well educated, properly trained, correctly muscled and well ridden regardless of breed or discipline. It is not the style of tack that makes the difference but the ease and elegance of movement, something we can all appreciate, that really matters. And this comes from teaching the horse how to carry us correctly.

Over the next several issues I will give you exercises to teach you how to coordinate your aids while developing your horse's weight-bearing posture, but it is your responsibility to refresh your memory on previous articles I have written about your seat and lateral positions. All this can be found in my books, readers and DVDs as well as the series of articles I have written for EH and my Horseman's Gazette segments. Spring is coming soon so now's the time to study up and get ready to enjoy the ride!



DEVELOPING A SOFT, WILLING, RELAXED RELATIONSHIP

By Alice Trindle

HAVE YOU EVER TREATED YOURSELF TO THE RELAXATION AND PURE PLEASURE OF A GOOD MUSCLE MASSAGE? OR DISCOVERED THE EUPHORIA AND SENSE OF WELL-BEING THAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STRETCHING AND FLEXING OF A YOGA OR PILATES ROUTINE? IF YOU HAVE, YOU KNOW THAT THE FEELING ACHIEVED IS ADDICTIVE, AND YOU DEFINITELY LOOK FORWARD TO THE EXPERIENCE.

That is the attitude and feeling I would like to develop as a method of operation both for myself and for my horse. I want to establish posture and balance that is based on relaxation, flexibility and suppleness. In order to accomplish this beautiful ballet with my horse, I need to prepare us both mentally, emotionally, and physically for the dance. I can do this, in part, by accomplishing a series of warm-up exercises that prepare the horse and rider team for a great experience.

Let's start by getting ourselves prepared. Of course our overall physical conditioning is very important. Exercises that lengthen, strengthen, and supple are a must for all aspiring horsemen. There are a number of great videos available that will help give you a routine to follow. In particular, I find the Pilates and yoga exercises beneficial. But let's look at three specific stretches we can do, while on board or on the ground, prior to riding. This series will work from my head (i.e., my atlas or poll), down through the neck, shoulders, and the rib cage. Here is the progression that I will go through first on me, and then progress to supple the same body parts of my horse:

Atlas (Poll) and Neck: As you sit with good posture on your horse, or on the edge of a straight back chair, or stand with good posture – Try lengthening your neck by politely dropping your chin, and extending your atlas upward, as if there were a feather on the top of your head that you wanted to lift. Next, in this position look softly left, then right. Be gentle, and only go as far as it feels comfortable. Close your eyes and identify what muscles are stretching, and which are flexing or contracting. Feel how you get a little wrinkle in your jowl area as you look and turn your head and chin softly.

Application & Positioning for the Horse – (Massage Position No. 1)

While on board, ride your horse forward at the walk, and focus on a fairly straight line. Shorten one rein of your snaffle bit rein, or horseman's halter lead rope, or true hackamore, and lift the rein forward, up, and slightly towards the horse's outside ear. If I am lifting on the right rein, I should see the horse's right eye, and lift towards the left ear. My right leg will encourage





the horse to move forward, and to help him know that I am asking for a right bend. I will hold this position until the horse gives slightly by lifting his poll (similar to the feather example for us humans), and develops a wrinkle or two in his jowl area. Remember: This is massage therapy, so your positioning in the saddle and your posture are there to accomplish the best massage FOR THE HORSE! Hold the positioning as you walk for a short period of time, and release the hold in your rein very gently. I think of my hands as holding warm taffy, where I can't truly pull, but rather coax and massage, feeling for the release of tension. As the rein becomes light as air, I relax the rein position and follow the motion of the taffy, giving back softly to the horse. Release when the horse is soft and there is no brace in the rein.

Remember that your goal is to relax and supple your horse. This is not a drill and we want to set it up so the horse seeks these massage positions. You will have even greater success if you start either on the ground or in the saddle with the lengthening of the top line in a long and low picture. Note that all of these suppling positions are accomplished with forward movement to facilitate a more dynamic, organic stretch.

Massage/Supple Position No. 1 primarily asked us to relax the poll area and release the TMJ. Now let's move on down the neck vertebra to influence from the atlas, down through C1 and C2, and further down the neck.

Neck and Shoulders: For us humans, let's go back to relax-

"For kicks, pull your chin into your chest, and then try to look right and left. This gives you a little empathy for those horses that are ridden in tie-downs, or by people who 'pull' back on the reins to get the horse's head to go down!"

ing at the atlas, with a slight movement looking gently right and left. Start with the position No. 1, and as you look slightly to the right, quietly drop your right ear towards your right shoulder. Be kind to yourself. You are not demanding that the muscles stretch, but rather lengthen and release tension gently. Come back to neutral and start again by feeling for the feather on the top of your head, then looking to the left, feeling for a little wrinkle in your jowl area, and finish with a lowering of your left ear. Enjoy the stretch along the right side of your neck. As you become more limber, try increasing the flex by lowering your ear towards your shoulder and begin to accompany the movement with a tipping of your shoulders too. Note how it feels even better when you start by lifting your atlas, then finding those little wrinkles in your jowl, and last lifting a shoulder.



POSITION NO. 1

Application & Positioning for the Horse – (Massage Position No. 2)

Again, while on board and moving forward at the walk, shorten up on both reins, then go to Position No. 1, watching for the wrinkle in the jowls, but being mindful that the ears are staying relatively on a plane with the ground. Next lean a bit forward and push your outside rein (outside of the bend) forward too, directing the energy on a straight line. You will have a feel, or contact now in both reins, and both are directing the energy forward towards the outside ear and in the direction of travel. Watch first for the lifting of the poll, then the wrinkles in the jowls, and last some wrinkles in the neck, in front of the shoulders, near the spot where a breast collar might rest. Your inside leg helps keep the bend and suggest forward movement. Reward the slightest try and only hold for a short period, remembering to release slowly, like giving to warm taffy.

RELAXATION + FLEXING = SUPPLE

SUPPLE + LATERAL = STRENGTH

STRENGTH + SUPPLE = LIGHTNESS

LIGHTNESS + GATHERING OF ENERGY = COLLECTION IN BRILLIANCE

As you progress with these massaging positions, you'll notice several wonderful elements in your horse. First, as he becomes more supple, he also relaxes into the movement, and begins to seek a balance that allows him to find positive flexion, along with a positive attitude. You will also discover the value of the supportive rein when adding a 'feel' in the No. 2 position. This outside rein contact provides an opportunity for the horse to begin to re-balance, drawing the shoulder blades up and back via the balance in the neck and head. These are key elements in understanding a true "soft feel" that biomechanically positions the horse for better mobility and lightness.

A final supple position will continue to move down the body of the horse to ask for a more full-body flex, particularly along what Mark Russel refers to as "length-bend." Let's carry this suppling progression a little further to begin a comfortable flex through the rib cage as allowed by the skeleton structure.

Supple Position No. 3 - Atlas, Neck, Shoulders, and Rib cage: For the human, begin by flexing and suppling with Position No. 1 and then add in Position No. 2. Next, drop the shoulder in the direction you are looking, and feel the lengthening in the opposite rib cage. Note that you still have the wrinkles in your jowl, in neck, and now some wrinkles or flexing in your rib cage. It feels GOOD from your atlas, clear down through your back to your tailbone!

Application & Positioning for the Horse – (Massage Position No. 3)

As always, start with Position No. 1, add in the outside rein and suppling of the neck with Position No. 2, and next make an adjustment in the inside rein position. Draw the energy up towards the armpit of your outside arm. (Example: If you are flexing to the left, you see a wrinkle in the left jowl, and in the left shoulder area, and your left rein moves from up and forward to a trajectory towards your right armpit.) A little more leg may need to be applied to keep the forward motion. You want to feel the shoulder rising up, not diving down on to your hands. The ears of the horse should remain relatively level, not tipping forward with the jaw tipping back towards your boot. The idea is to develop a soft self-carriage, with the poll and shoulders lifting upwards, and the

energy coming from behind. Be very conscientious about your goals here. Remember you are giving a massage, and flexing and lengthening muscles a little more with each position. Be careful not to just drop the feeling on the reins.

It may take you a little time and work to get good at giving yourself and then your horse a wonderful massage, but can you imagine how much you would look forward to riding if every time it was preceded by a muscle massage? As you get more proficient, you will notice that your horse gets lighter when you pick up on the reins. Soon when the calf of your leg comes in contact, your horse will lift his poll and shoulders, find his driving force, and prepare a soft feel. He will be ready to go to work with a smile on his face knowing your hands are there to give a massage!

Please Note: There are many great additional warm-up and suppling exercises that I recommend to prepare yourself and your horse for a safe and fun day of riding. Visit the website at www.tnthorsemanship.com/articles for "articles and Tip for the Ride" videos. Other references:

- *Gymnastic Exercises for Horses, The Classical Way* by Eleanor Russell
- *Lessons in Lightness*, by Mark Russell





ZIPPO

by Milly Hunt Porter

EVEN THOUGH 1961 WAS OUR SIXTH WINTER IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA, GREEN GRASS AND GERANIUMS IN JANUARY STILL CAME AS A LUXURY FOR THE BODY AND SPIRIT.

The winter of 1960-61 this luxury was shared with my parents, George and Ruth Randall of Bruneau, Idaho. Both my parents were natives of Idaho. Mother was born in Owyhee County. Dad had come there from the Palouse area in Central Idaho. He was less than a year old when his parents moved to southwest Idaho. Dad's father's first job in Owyhee County was at the T Ranch near Bruneau.

Born in the mid 1890s my parents were beginning to have health issues. The family ranch in Little Valley, southwest of Bruneau, was left in good hands with other family members while my folks enjoyed a much milder climate for the winter with us.

Since Ray started colts for many of the ranchers and was available for day work he got invited to lots of brandings. In his earlier years Dad had done much work on horseback so he was happy to be included.

Mild weather, green grass, flowers and fat calves ready to brand, add to this mix a very special horse. Zippo was a fifteen-three-hand, eleven hundred fifty pound bay gelding with black points and white anklets behind – now being ridden straight-up in the bridle. To be invited along to gather and brand on an original Spanish Land Grant Ranch mounted on such a horse made Dad's winter days a true holiday.

An interesting side note to this story is the connection between the horse's owner's roots and my folks' roots. Melvin Jones, who owned the horse, was also, a native of Bruneau,



Ray Hunt and Zippo.

Idaho. As a young adult he had migrated to Nevada to work on some very big cattle ranches. Like most young buckaroos of the Great Basin Region he was always determined to own his own outfit someday. Now, in 1961, his cattle ranch near Carlin, Nevada, was growing and he produced many good horses.

We lived on the 101 Ranch in the Paicines District of San Benito County which was an easy drive to other area ranches. Probably easy is a relative term; that is, compared to the Nevada ranches we had previously called home.

Paicines had a post office and general store, and a one-room school which also functioned as a Community Center. Hollister, California, was

the banking, shopping, doctor, dentist, nearest town.

Our first move from Nevada to California in May 1955 was to the Mee Ranch near King City, California. Since moving to the area in late winter 1956 to work for George Rose, Hollister had been our town, even though this was our third mailing address in the area.

This last move from Paul Hudner's place up O'Rosa Morada Road to the 101 Ranch had followed some lean-bean years.

Ray had been born with what lay folks referred to as a club-foot. In 1929 doctors did not have the knowledge they do now. Families did not have the finances either. As an infant his little foot kept him from walking until after his brother Lawrence, who was born 17 months younger than Ray.

Then, as a small child, in the preschool age, he had been hospitalized for a number of months in casts. This treatment was away from home in the state of Utah.

The following years he had kept up, pretty much, with whatever was happening. He had a bit of a limp but not a handicap anyone was very aware of.

However, in his late twenties this foot problem became a real problem. The term we used to describe the problem was "the foot just broke down." Ray was on crutches to the doctor, to the specialists, to the State Department of Rehabilitation, to the hospital for surgery and months of healing. There were a few months to catch up, then a second surgery. Definitely those were difficult years.

The winter weather and my parents' visit were not the only luxuries we enjoyed that 1961 season. Everyone was in good health. After a slow start with extreme allergy problems our youngest child was going on two and doing well. The two oldest children were in school, while the two youngest were home being helpful.

Besides starting colts for other ranchers, and doing day-work, Ray had some ranchers and other folks whose horses he kept shod. In the early to mid-1950's, when Ray had worked on Nevada ranches, it was pretty much the custom for each buckaroo to own a few basic shoeing tools and know how to use them.

When Ray left the 101 Ranch to go do farrier work, Dad usually stayed behind, however, he did not miss any opportunity to go gather and brand.

Probably going to the Quien Sabe Ranch was the biggest treat of all. Even for that area this ranch was exceptional in many ways. It was an original Spanish Land Grand property. It had been in the same family for generations. Frank and Lola Galli pretty much took care of the cattle for the owners. They

had been part of the ranch for years.

Although Frank was nearly my Dad's age; he was busy on the ranch every day. I never saw Frank in anything but a clean, white shirt. Even at the end of a branding day, Frank would be in a clean white shirt. The mystery for me was how could he do that when he was the one castrating and marking the calves?

I'm thinking Dad's riding Zippo did not make him a better bridle horse nor less. Zippo was a pretty solid horse when he came to be with us, although he was owned by Melvin Jones and was with us to be sold. He had spent some time in San Benito County with Melvin's brother Marvin.

Marvin was a capable fellow, a good horseman, who had kept Zippo for Melvin while Zippo was still in the hackamore. While Zippo was with Ray he had transitioned through the stages to the bridle.

In those years it probably cost less to breed and feed a horse in Nevada than it did in California. That big open country was good for horses in body and mind, but when it was time to find a home for the finished bridle horse, the prospective buyers were in the more populated places.

Dad and Mom left for home in late March. Dad had a new enthusiasm for life. He had been there when Tom Dorrance first helped with Hondo. He had met Frank Galli, his own age and going strong. He had ridden a fine horse and had seen the areas of San Benito County he wanted most to see. All of these things were a bonus for the time he had spent playing with grand-kids—Geri 12, Joel 8, Kathy 5 and Elaine 2 years.

Later the folks were excited when we called to tell them Hondo won his first show in Woodside, California.

In early summer we sent them a picture of Ray on Zippo with the trophy and blue ribbon. After that Melvin's horse had a new home when Ray found Melvin a buyer.

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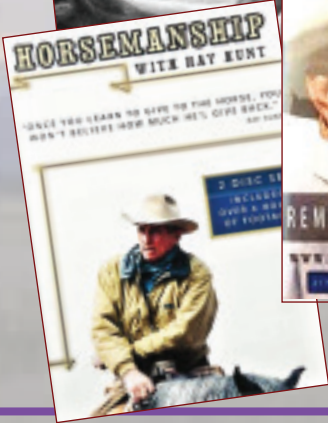
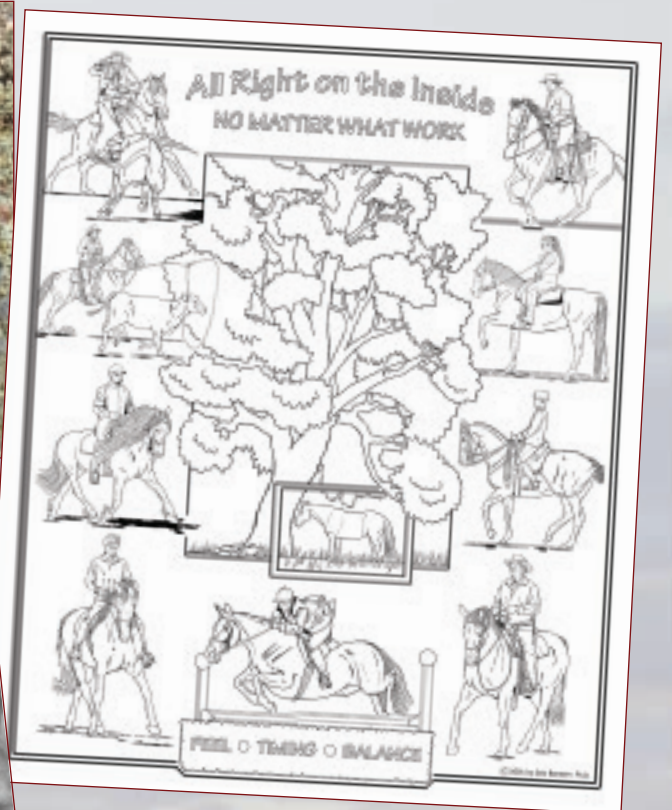
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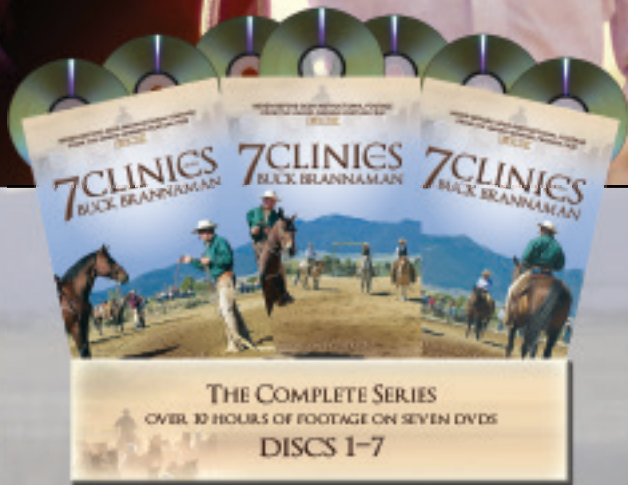
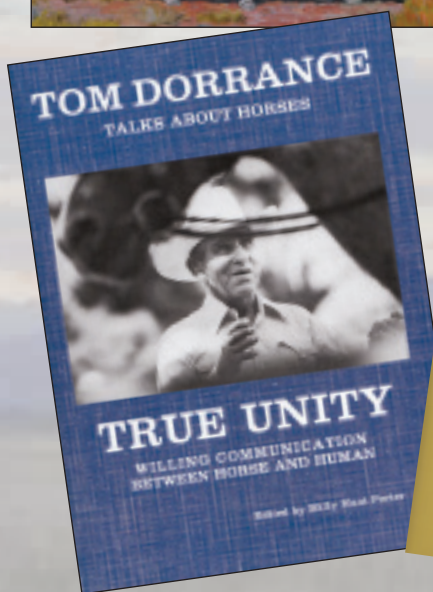
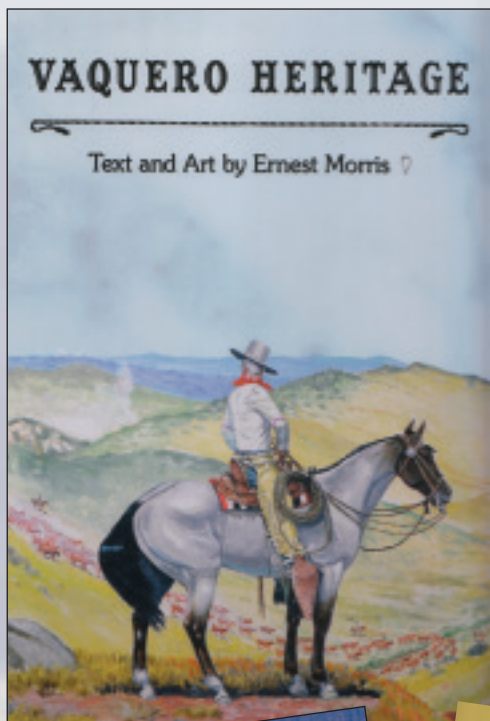
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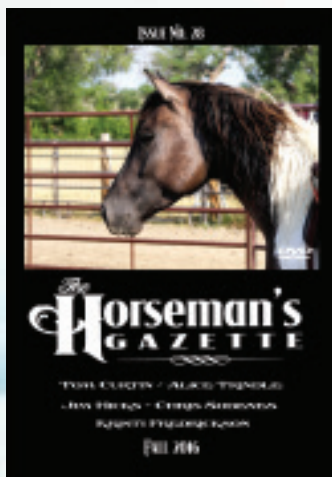
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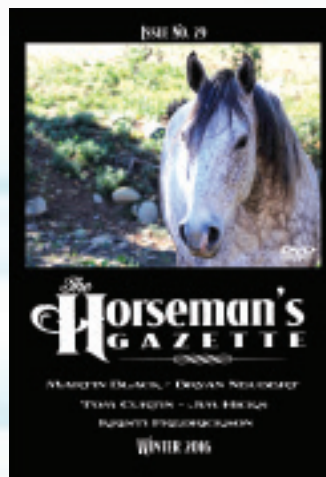
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