

HAYES IS FOR HORSES®

- CROSS TRAINING -

GOOD FOR HUMANS ----- GOOD FOR HORSES

BY
TIM HAYES



Tim & Tom Dorrance 1996 photo courtesy - Tim Hayes Collection

In 1996 I participated in a Natural Horsemanship clinic given by the late Tom Dorrance. Even though he was a cowboy, well over half of his students rode English. Tom was a creator of miracles when it came to helping people with their horse problems (he called them: *“people problems”*). His message was simple: *“humans and horses need to get along better.”* Tom was not only acknowledged as a great horseman but the father of a revolution in horse training... what is now referred to as *Natural Horsemanship*.

When the clinic was over I asked Tom what books he would recommend I read. I was expecting him to say a book with a title like, *“Lessons From The Ranch”*. Instead he simply said read *“Dressage”* by *Henry Wynmalen*. I had heard of Dressage. I knew riders with English saddles practiced it. However it was the last thing I thought a California cowboy would know about much less be recommending.

In the spring of 2001 I attended Equitana USA in Louisville Kentucky. It was a four-day event held in two buildings each the size of New York’s Madison Square Garden. One was totally devoted to English, the other Western. On the fourth day I listened to a wonderful talk on the benefits achieved in competitive equine events with something called: *Cross Training* by a 28-year-old rodeo star named Ty Murray.

Two years before Ty had received the award of *World Champion All Around Cowboy*. It was the 7th time he received it. No one has ever done it since. Ty began his talk by saying: *“When I began training for the rodeo, I realized that at 5’8” and 150lbs, there was no way I could ever control a 2,000 lb. bull. But I could learn to control myself and how I reacted and responded to them.”* Ty went on to say that he began to practice martial arts and use a trampoline to master his equine reflexes and balance. He called it *“Cross Training”*

As I listened to Ty, I thought back to Tom Dorrance recommending I study and practice Dressage. I began to think that maybe one way to become good at one sport was to practice a different sport that has similar physical skills. I remembered years ago reading an article about professional football players who used ballet exercises in their practice to improve their agility.

Today *Cross Training* is widely accepted and practiced in many sports. Nowhere is it more valuable than with riding horses. As I like to say: *“horseback riding, no matter what discipline, is the only sport where you can fail because your “equipment” becomes anxious.”*

Like Ty Murray on his bull, I need to be able to control myself in how I respond to my horse. Not only to have fun or to win, but more importantly... to be safe. Natural Horsemanship teaches me that being good with horses is more than having the physical ability to perform a Piaffe or a Slide Stop. I also need the skill and knowledge to control the mental and emotional states of both my horse and me. Horses learn through repetition but they can also become bored and dull with routine. Horses that are constantly drilled for any type of riding or competition often breakdown mentally before they breakdown physically. Striving for success on any level can be stressful for both horse and rider. *Cross Training* with your horse can relieve stress for both horse and rider. It can be is easy, fun and make a significant positive improvement in any equine discipline.

Whether you ride English or Western taking your horse on a leisurely trail ride can do wonders for you both. Doing something together, not having an agenda or schedule, allows you and your horse quality time to just enjoy each other. (Horses that have not gone on trails before should always start by riding with other trail experienced horses and riders that are relaxed and confident.) As you and your horse become comfortable and start enjoying being together out in the country, your regular routine, be it Jumping, Dressage, Barrel Racing or Equitation will become less stressful, more fun and most often improve.

If most of your horse activity is trail riding, learning how to ride over small jumps or practicing more sophisticated communication with simple Dressage exercises can become your *Cross Training*. For those who jump, practice a little Dressage. For Dressage riders, learning how to go over small jumps in harmony with your horse greatly improves your balance, your seat and your confidence. For all riders, learning where each one of your horses feet are at all times, knowing how to move your horse laterally and many other Dressage exercises are wonderful ways to improve your lightness, flexibility and control in any discipline.

The take home message is that horses are just like humans. If every time they see us they think: *“She’s going to ask me to do the same thing again, how boring”* or *“He’s going to take me into that arena and drill me till I go nuts”* eventually they’re going to get bored, stressed, lose interest and start resisting. Wouldn’t you? On the other hand if we can add some variety in our program, whether we’re

competing or pleasure riding, our horses will look at us and think: “Great, here she comes. She makes my life so interesting.” Or, “I wonder what we’re doing today? He’s always fun to play with.”

One of the wonderful things about my Natural Horsemanship Clinics – See:

<http://www.hayesisforhorses.com/about-clinics/> - is at one time or another everyone gets to do some *Cross Training* with their horse. Our English riders learn to ride without a bit and with just a halter and our Western riders learn about collection. By the time the Clinic is over not only have we improved our relationship with our horse, we have all accomplished something just as important...we’ve had fun!

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” --- A. Einstein

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Natural Horsemanship articles by Tim Hayes are at: *www.hayesisforhorses.com*

Tim Hayes is the author of RIDING HOME - The Power of Horses to Heal. It is this amazing power of horses to heal and teach us about ourselves that is accessible to everyone and found in the pages this book. To learn more about the book please visit: <http://www.ridinghome.com/>