



Ray Hunt Clinic

The more observant you become the better you'll be with horses. 99% of the time everything a horse does that can cause us problems, is preceded by his exhibiting some type of physical signal or some other noticeable behavior. Learning and remembering these behavioral alerts becomes enormously helpful in order to respond at your best with what happens next. It's called: "knowing what happens before what happens happens". Horses are black belts at

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 By **TIM HAYES**



Tim and Buck Brannanam; 1999

I would like to begin this month's article by highly recommending the 2011 award-winning documentary "Buck" by Cindy Meehl...the story of Buck Brannanam and a film about Natural Horsemanship. Buck Brannanam is one of today's master horsemen and someone I have been honored to know and learn from. When I think of what I have learned from Buck's teaching I also think about what I learned from one of Buck's teacher's the late Ray Hunt.

In the late 1950's Ray Hunt became the first disciple of the late Tom Dorrance who is now considered by most to be the father of Natural Horsemanship of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Years ago I participated in an 8-day Natural Horsemanship Clinic given by Ray in the Canadian Rockies on a one million acre cattle ranch situated in northern British Columbia. It was spectacular.

I learned many things at that clinic about how to get good with horses but the one that helped me the most was something Ray said that has since become one of his most famous quotes: "Observe, Remember, Compare". Simply put it means every time you're interacting with your horse observe how he or she behaves in each and every situation no matter how insignificant it may seem.

Whatever you observe your horse doing when you're interacting with him; remember it. Remember it until the next time you're together and interacting again. Then compare how he behaved the first time to how he's behaving now. It will reveal valuable information. Most importantly you'll learn if the two of you are getting better, getting worse or staying the same. If a change is required and you are already natural with horses you'll know the first change you need to make is in yourself in order to create a change in your horse.

If you're leading your horse on the ground is he walking at your shoulder, behind you or in front of you? When you're riding and ask him to stop does he come to a dead stop at your first request or does he take a few extra steps before completely stopping? If he starts to buck what did you observe him do right before he started bucking?

this because their survival depends on always being one step ahead of predators. Getting good at observing and paying attention like horses do will also help your self-preservation. You may already know you need to pay attention to your horse's ears when he pins them back or that before he bucks he always drops his head. That's good but there are hundreds more.

Learning, understanding and practicing to be this aware of your horse is not only helpful in improving your riding and horsemanship, it is paramount in staying safe and protecting yourself and your horse from getting hurt. Knowing and being aware of something as simple as the fact that your horse laterally bends his head and neck around easier to the right than to the left may one day save your life on a trail ride. If for some reason your horse becomes so fearful that he decides he must take off and run as fast as he can, then knowing that you have a better chance of shutting him down by bending his head to the right as opposed to the left becomes something you'll be grateful you remembered.

To observe, remember and compare is also an excellent way to learn what horses are capable of and how good some of them can be. Riding is the only sport or human endeavor where the "equipment" or "instrument" as well as the person, must also learn to achieve certain levels of expertise. I can use Derek Jeter's glove but I won't play like Derek Jeter; I'll still play like me. I can play on Billy Joel's piano but I won't play like Billy Joel; I'll still play like me.

If however I am able to observe what it physically feels like to ride a Grand Prix Dressage horse or a Champion Reining horse

Continued on page 36

then I will forever know what is possible to achieve and how far I still have to progress with my horse or my journey with horses. It's one thing to watch a rider on an accomplished horse execute a Piaffe or a Slide Stop. It's quite another to have a horse who already knows how to do it show you what it should feel like. Humans teach horses - Horses teach humans.

Of all the human disciplines horses are asked to participate in whether it's Dressage, Jumping, Polo or Cutting; I believe Calf-Roping horses are the ultimate when it comes to partnering with a human to accomplish a goal. Not only does the horse come to a dead stop the second he feels the rider's rope going around the cow's neck but he helps the rider by preventing the cow from standing up and getting away. He does this by slowly backing up and pulling the cow toward him until the rider can dismount, run over and tie the cow's feet. For me this is the ultimate example of a horse/human partnership.

Many years ago I had the opportunity of riding my friend's horse Spot. Spot it turned out had just been named the 1992 Idaho State Champion Roping Horse. I remember galloping across a large arena and going so fast I began to think I should stop. I remember the moment I thought I wanted to stop; Spot stopped. Stopped dead. Nailed it. Dead on a dime. I've never forgotten how it felt.

From that day until now I know how I would like my horses to stop. Even if they don't stop like Spot I know what's possible. Because I observed, remembered and compared what it felt like on a Champion Roping horse, I now had a goal and knew what I needed to work on. Observe, Remember and Compare. It made me better with horses; it will make you better with horses too.