



Riding & Natural Horsemanship Part 1

Today's article begins a three part series on riding. Part One: a look at some of the formative periods in both the art and history of riding. Part Two: the influence of Natural Horsemanship during both these historical periods. Part Three: the actual methods and tools of Natural Horsemanship as they apply to riding. Before we begin with it's history in terms of riding let's affirm what Natural Horsemanship is and what it is not.

There are many misconceptions in today's horse world about the term Natural Horsemanship. They include: it's a gimmick for making money, it's for cowboys or those who only ride Western, it's only about groundwork, it's for riding bitless or bridleless, it's new-age touchy-feely stuff, it has nothing to do with riding, it's not for Jumping, Dressage or people who ride English etc. None of these could be further from the truth.

Natural Horsemanship simply means what is natural for the horse as opposed to what is natural for the human. It means understanding the psychology and behavior of the horse and learning how to actually communicate with the horse in his language instead of using force and intimidation; i.e. body language, touch and feel vs. "kick'm to go, pull'm to stop". It does not rely on verbal communication be it in English, French, German or any other language.

It means communicating with the horse not just physically but mentally and emotionally as well. It means controlling the whole horse: every action, every thought and every feeling, from his mind to his body to his legs to his feet. Although there are those who think Natural Horsemanship and it's methods are a recent equine development or something new, it is anything but.

The principals of Natural Horsemanship can be traced back to 350B.C. and found within the pages of "The Art Of Horsemanship" by the Greek General Xenophon who wrote: "To force a horse when he does not understand is like spurring and whipping a dancer." From that time and throughout history the most successful and victorious armies of the world had the greatest cavalries and the greatest cavalries were always led by superior horsemen: Xenophon, Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great and Napoleon to name a few. All were passionate about the relationships they had with their horses. Both horse and rider were deeply bonded with mutual love, trust and respect.

For almost two thousand years superior armies conquered the cities of the world: armies of soldiers, many of whom were superior horsemen, who rode superior horses. With every step at any gait, in any direction the horse and rider shared a life and

death relationship. Both required the highest confidence, unwavering trust and a partnership of amazing desire to succeed in their purpose. This was the art of horsemanship at its highest level and the origin of Natural Horsemanship.

In our country the philosophy of Natural Horsemanship can be traced back a few hundred years to the Native Americans. The "First People" lived with the understanding that the earth was a shared resource for all creatures. Horses like all animals were treated with kindness and respect, as were all other living things that shared the planet.

Chiefs who were magnificent horsemen, like European army generals hundreds of years before, led the most revered tribes: Crazy Horse of the Lakota Sioux and Geronimo of the Apache. Their relationships with their horses were created with mutual love, trust and respect. How else could a Native American warrior ride at top speed with no saddle and without holding his reins as he held, aimed and shot his arrows with deadly accuracy.

Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce tribe in their desire to have the greatest war ponies actually created the Appaloosa, one of our countries most popular breeds (The name evolved from the "Palouse" river that ran through the tribe's Northwest American land.).

The end of the Native American civilization was also the end of American's original Natural Horsemen. Almost nothing about



An illustration of the Greek General, Xenophon.

their method was written down or past on. All that remained was what was seen in movies: Cowboys rode with saddles: Indians rode bareback. For a time it looked like "Traditional Horsemanship" (kick'm to go, pull'm to stop) might become the only option for the horse and rider of America.

Just like humans, horses perform at their best when they have a job or purpose. As the militaries of western civilization replaced their horses with motorized vehicles, an equine purpose requiring the highest and most sophisticated level of communication and athleticism became obsolete. The control and complicated maneuvers needed to fight an enemy to the death while protecting both horse and rider were no longer necessary.

In countries such as France, Germany, England, Spain and Austria master horsemen, many of them former military generals, opened riding academies and wrote books in order to continue what they knew from battle to be the principles of great riding: "The Art" of horsemanship. And so you had the renowned books of Francois Baucher and General Decarpentry of France, Waldemar Seunig of Germany, Henry Wynmalen of England and Colonel Alois Podhajsky of the Austrian Army and Chief of the Spanish School of Riding in Vienna.

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Groundwork or "work in hand," which is an integral part in establishing natural communication between horse and rider, is sometimes confused with being the sole the purpose of Natural Horsemanship. It is in fact just the beginning in the art of riding and horsemanship. It is the principal foundation in the curriculum of the Spanish School of Riding. Originally founded in 1572 it is considered by many to be the finest riding academy in the world. If one is accepted into this prestigious program they are not allowed to ride until they have first created a relationship with their horse on the ground. Remarkably the time allotted for this is 4 years! It is only then that the student begins to ride. Graduation is celebrated at the end of 8 years (4 of groundwork, 4 of riding).

In the early twentieth century the American military like those of other countries became motorized disbanding most of its cavalry. However unlike it's European counterpart it did not have many of the master horsemen (as mentioned above) opening schools, writing books and passing on the art of horsemanship. America however had something else. Something that would bond horse and rider in a true partnership; something unique that could give horses a similar sense of purpose they felt when carrying their soldiers into battle: The American Cowboy.

Next month we will see how a few American cowboys helped carry the message and continued to share the ancient principals and philosophies of the superior riding and classical horsemanship we now refer to as Natural Horsemanship. For more historical information and suggested reading go to: "Links and Library" at www.hayesisforhorses.com.

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Proposed Dressage Rule Change on the Minds of Many Gathered for 2008 U.S. Equestrian Federation Annual Meeting

The U.S. Equestrian Federation meets this week in Louisville, Kentucky for its annual meeting, scheduled for Jan. 9-13 and the

Dressage Committee has its work cut out. A proposed rule change that would require riders to qualify to compete at Third Level and above beginning in 2010 has generated much discussion within the dressage community.

The proposed rule change, officially called 275-07, states that riders competing in dressage competitions at Third Level and above must be eligible according to qualification criteria established by the USEF Dressage Committee. What exactly those criteria would be has not yet been determined, but the general idea being tossed around is to create a sort of point system, similar to what is seen in Europe.

Essentially, under a point system, riders earn points based on their scores in recognized competitions. For example, under the latest suggestions that will be discussed during the Dressage Committee's Thursday meeting, scores of 58 - 59.99 percent would earn one point, scores of 60 - 62.99 percent, two points and so on.

Both the USEF Dressage Committee and the organization's Board of Directors will vote on the proposed change at this week's annual meeting. What they are voting on is simply a proposal to establish a process for creating a qualification system. In a memo to the dressage community, the USEF Dressage Committee noted that it would be at least 2010 before any qualification system was actually put into place.

If proposed rule 275-07 is passed this week during the annual meeting, the next step will be the actual creation of a qualification system. The process of creating such a system would occur over the next two years, which should give the dressage community time to adjust and give their input.

Some, however, are concerned that the Dressage Committee has already made decisions on how this qualification system will operate. And, indeed, at this week's annual convention, suggestions for competition standards will be discussed.

Those suggestions include the idea of the point system mentioned above. How many points would be needed to move up a level is undecided but suggested numbers range from 10 to 20. There would be no qualification required, however, to ride tests up through Second Level or to compete in the FEI Pony classes or in the USEF Four-Year-Old or the Five and Six-Year-Old FEI classes.



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