



Riding & Natural Horsemanship Part 2

Last month we looked at the historical origins of Natural Horsemanship. First written about in 350B.C., practiced for thousands of years by the conquering armies of the world, taught in Europe at academies such as the renowned Spanish School of Riding of Vienna Austria and finally practiced in America by Native Americans only to disappear along with their civilization.

Twentieth Century America without the schools and books of it's European counterparts could have quite possibly relied on traditional training, riding and horsemanship: "kick'm to go, pull'm to stop" were it not for the cowboys who relied on their horses as partners as they worked the great cattle ranches of the West.

High level horsemanship, which included: partnership, harmony, finesse and athleticism, no longer necessary for a non-existent cavalry, was quite necessary to control the millions of cattle grazing the lands of the American West. Most ranchers and cowboys were traditional horseman. As time passed it became obvious that the speed, accuracy, desire and agility all needed to manage cattle required high levels of finesse and communication between horse and rider.

Having no historical American source to turn to a small handful of cowboys in their pursuit of improving their own horsemanship and training skills began reading the books of the European master horsemen. The equine maneuvers that helped soldiers become victorious in war now began bringing cowboys both greater success and vast improvements in their ability to manage livestock. When looked at side by side there are striking similarities in the equine maneuvers that evolved from the soldiers of ancient civilizations to the European Classical Dressage masters and eventually to the American Cowboy.

The lateral movements that helped to protect a soldier in battle and look so beautiful in the half-pass of dressage look remarkably similar to a cowboy side passing up to open a fence. The warhorse that turns 360 degrees in an instant to do battle from all sides is like the high-level dressage horse turning on his

haunches that in turn is like the ranch horse that must be able to spin on a dime to go after a runaway steer. It's also the same as the competitive Reining horse executing a "Spin". The sport of Western Reining in fact has often been referred to as "Dressage With Speed."

When I first started my journey with horses I had an ego based "us vs. them" attitude. I was a cowboy; I rode Western. They Jumped and did Dressage; they rode English. They had their costume; I had mine. Other than both having a horse we had nothing in common. When I discovered Natural Horsemanship and it's teachings and principals I knew it transcended both. It had a sense of rightness that is only ever found in the truth.

I was blessed by befriending and studying with some of the greatest American horseman of our time. Their searches for truth had them seek out, read and recommend the works of their European counterparts. As my learning continued my "us vs. them" attitude slowly began to erode.

Tom Dorrance who wrote "True Unity", the first American book on Natural Horsemanship, suggested I read "Dressage" by the British master horseman Henry Wynmalen. Pat Parelli told me to read "Complete Training of the Horse & Rider" by the Austrian Alois Podhajsky chief of the Spanish School of Riding. Jack Brainard recommended I read "Horsemanship" by the German Waldemar Seunig and "Academic Equitation" by French General Decarpentry.

Today, thanks to a few 20th century cowboys who only a little more than 50 years ago wanted to find a better way to train horses, teach humans, use a more humane method of communication and continue using principals proven to be the zenith of horse-



Tom Dorrance: Father of twentieth century Natural Horsemanship recommended Tim read 'Dressage' by Henry Wynmalen; 1996.

manship by some of the greatest horsemen in recorded civilization; Natural Horsemanship, it's principals and it's methods of equine communication in any riding discipline, is now a reality and a gift to horses and humans everywhere. The reason it has become so popular and is spreading throughout the world so fast is simple: IT WORKS!

In next month's issue we will examine the theory, practice, methods and tools of Natural Horsemanship as they specifically apply to the practice of riding. For more historical information and suggested reading go to "Links and Library" at www.hayesisforhorses.com

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