



Riding & Natural Horsemanship: Part 6

By Tim Hayes

Five months ago we began a series of articles on Natural Horsemanship and its influence on Riding - both English and Western. We looked at specific periods in the art and history of riding, the influence of Natural Horsemanship during these periods and finally the methods and tools of Natural Horsemanship as they apply to riding.

In examining the methods and tools we discovered there were three primary elements required from both human and horse: Physical Harmony, Mutually Understandable Communication and A Cooperative Positive Relationship. In this, the final article of the series we will examine the last of these primary elements: A Cooperative Positive Relationship. (To read this series in its entirety go to the "Monthly Articles" section at: www.hayesisforhorses.com.)

I believe the most significant factor in achieving happiness is the quality of our relationships: relationships with ourselves, with others and, if so inclined, with God. Of these the most challenging is our relationship with others. Developing and having a cooperative positive relationship with a horse is remarkably similar to developing and having one with another human and requires the same effort and desire. From the beginning of time the simplest yet most profound formula for both humans and horses is and has been: "Treat others the same way you wish to be treated."

Like most people I don't like to be told what to do; much less be forced to do it. I don't like to be judged, criticized or made to feel wrong. I like to feel that my relationship with my friends, family or significant other is a partnership where we enjoy each other, support each other and accept each other for who we really are and not whom we wish the other would be.

Many of my relationships work best when I and the other person know and feel we are equal partners and treat each other that way. However there are some relationships that work best when someone is the senior partner or "Leader." This is true anytime two humans decide to dance together and wish to avoid stepping on each other's toes. It is true when raising and parenting a child. It is just as true in a partnership with a horse that is allowing you to ride on his back. For a rider to have a cooperative positive relationship with a horse he must become the leader.

The most important reason to be the leader in this partnership is for the safety of you and your horse. If your horse does not accept you as his leader and does not follow all your requests there are things he may decide to do that could not only put him at great physical risk but put you there as well. If you or your horse think you're not completely safe than neither of you will feel safe. It is impossible to ride together in harmony much less at your best if you or your horse does not feel 100% safe.

There are three mandatory elements needed to create a cooperative positive relationship between horse and human: mutual love, trust and respect. All three must be established and mutually demonstrated before a horse will allow his rider to become his leader. They are also mandatory in creating positive intimate relationships among humans. Try to imagine having a relationship with someone significant if you're missing any one of these three: it's impossible.

All three elements are achieved the same way with horses as they are with humans: with communication and behavior. To communicate and be understood you must first be able to speak in the same language as your partner. The problem with most horse/human partnerships is poor communication: horses don't speak English; they communicate with body language, touch and feel.

Horses go on to establish leadership by physically dominating each other. Natural Horsemanship teaches humans they can actually replicate the dominant behavior of the alpha horse and in so doing become the accepted leader. As with horses, humans (riders) begin by doing this on the ground and call it "groundwork."

Without the ability to communicate in the horses "natural" language the human (rider) must resort to what I refer to as the



Tim and Austin enjoying a Cooperative Positive Relationship.

"traditional" method of equine communication. This method, though momentarily effective, over time becomes totally counter productive in developing a cooperative positive relationship. This is the method of force, intimidation and pain: "I kick my horse to go. If he doesn't go I kick harder." "I pull on the bit to get my horse to stop. If he doesn't stop I pull harder." The "traditional" method of communication is also the quickest way to loose your horses love, trust and respect.

Today the "traditional" method is still widely practiced in all disciplines both English and Western and most often with the same counter productive results. Horses don't care what type of saddle you have. They've never cared. They only care once they discover you can communicate with them in their language and not with force intimidation and pain. This then becomes the quickest way to earn your horses love trust and respect.

As we learned at the beginning of this series "Natural Horsemanship" simply means what is natural for the horse not what is natural for the human (rider). Creating a Cooperative Positive relationship (the third primary element after Physical Harmony and Mutually Understandable communication) is the same for horses as it is for humans. Both require mutual love, trust and respect.

This is only possible with understanding, compassion and communication. Understandable communication requires the human to learn the body language of the horse. This is always begun on the ground and replicates the natural language of the horse. This method eventually allows the horse to accept his rider as his leader in a true positive cooperative relationship. It is then that horse and rider are in perfect harmony. It is then that they ride with unity and grace in any saddle they want.

To find out about Clinics, Group Classes and Private Sessions with Tim, call: 631-329-5840. Or visit: www.hayesisforhorses.com.