

# WHAT IS A NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP CLINIC? AND SHOULD I DO ONE? BY TIM HAYES



Build your relationship on the ground  
Photos -Tim Hayes collection



Become your horses leader on his back

The increasing popularity of Natural Horsemanship Clinics has come from two primary factors. The first is a new and greater demand for equine knowledge. Over 50% of the population is now baby boomers with more leisure time. People who were never around horses as kids are now discovering the joy of connecting with and or owning a horse for the first time in their 40's, 50's and 60's. They didn't grow up around horses and they need guidance. The second factor are the unequivocal benefits of Natural Horsemanship, it's programs, it's teachers and it's methods.

The participants in my clinics come from all levels and all disciplines. New horse owners, 3<sup>rd</sup> level dressage riders, show jumpers, trail riders, even equine therapists. There are Belgian Drafts, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Ponies, Arabians, Mules and Mustangs. Horses are ridden in every conceivable saddle; Hunter Seat, Dressage, Western, Cutting, Eventing and Barrel Racing. Some ride Bareback.

Most problems people have in horseback riding, whether English or Western, are not with their riding; they're with the quality of the relationship they have with their horse. Any successful relationship whether with horse or human must be based on mutual love, trust and respect. All relationship problems begin when any one of these is missing. One way to improve your relationship and establish all three of these qualities is with the methods of Natural Horsemanship.

Natural Horsemanship begins by teaching us horse psychology. This gives us the knowledge of how and why our horse thinks and feels about everything in his world. This provides us with the understanding and the explanations as to why our horse sometimes resists our requests. Without this knowledge we don't know if our horse is resisting because of fear, disrespect, misunderstanding or pain. How can we help our horse and improve our relationship, if we don't know what he's trying to tell us?

How a horse thinks and feels is always expressed physically in his body language (i.e. ear pinning, kicking, biting, licking & chewing, bucking etc.) Body language is how horses communicate with other horses and if we are going to truly communicate with horses, we must learn and use their language.

Learning his language we immediately know what our horse is saying to us with his physical behavior. Then we can appropriately respond whether we're on the ground or on his back. When we respond appropriately our horse realizes we understand what he's trying to tell us. Then he begins to trust us, respect us and eventually look to us as his leader.

Without this knowledge of what and why our horse thinks and feels, the only way we can interpret our horses' behavior is by guessing, assuming, or asking our friends. Often this can be frustrating, providing many different answers that are very often confusing or wrong. Without offering the right response, we are unable to effectively communicate and thus correct and eliminate the undesirable behavior of our horse.

The goal of all horse/human relationships is a positive willing partnership with the horse happily accepting his human as his leader. *Traditional* horsemanship focuses on riding with *physical communication* between human and horse. *Natural Horsemanship* teaches how to communicate with the horse *not only physically but mentally and emotionally*, first on the ground (which is more natural and understandable for the horse) and then on his back. If my horse isn't responding to me with willingness and respect on the ground then I need to ask myself is he truly responding to me when we ride or is he deciding to accommodate me just to get it over with?

Have you ever ridden very well in a show and then, as you led your horse back to the barn, been pulled around as he keeps diving for grass? Have you ridden your horse on a trail or in a ring when he suddenly spooks or becomes anxious and nothing you do seems to calm him down to his or your satisfaction? Knowing that you and your horse love each other, have you ever wondered why he/she can be so difficult at times? Many of the men and women who come to my clinics and classes come with these and many other similar questions.

There are thousands of excellent professionals who teach horseback riding in every possible discipline: Jumping, Dressage, Trail Riding, Polo, Barrel Racing, Eventing and Reining. However what is so often missing is the necessary mental and emotional understanding necessary for a quality relationship. Becoming your horse's leader naturally is always achieved most effectively when begun on the ground...horses don't ride other horses. Create a relationship of mutual love, trust, respect and understanding before you sit on his back. When you get your relationship right with your horse, he'll always give you his best performance because he's already given you his heart.

Sometimes instead of asking, "how is my riding?" a better question to ask is "how is my relationship?" When it comes to my horse, these are my priorities: Do I always feel safe, am I having fun, am I achieving my goals, does my horse respond to me as his leader? If not, I asked myself what do I need to do to have me and my horse become safer, calmer, more confident, more respectful and more fun to ride. The answer to this question I believe is not about working on my riding; it's about working on myself and in turn the quality of my relationship with my horse.

**Presently my clinics and classes cover 10 basic topics of *Natural Horsemanship* and include a booklet with a program for the future.** The 10 topics covered in my clinics are effective for any discipline whether English or Western. They are: 1. Principles of Natural horsemanship; including horse time vs. human time and horse fear vs. human fear. 2. Communicating with your horse in his own (body) language. 3. Safety- learning the tools and techniques that need to be perfect 100% of the time. 4. Groundwork Exercises that establish love, trust and respect. 5. Gentleness vs. Firmness.

Which one, how much and when? 6. Natural saddling skills. 7. Transferring natural communication with your horse from the ground to his back. 8. The natural principles & methods of GO/WHOA/TURN/STOP/BACK. 9. Natural Riding skills: Focus, Feel, Timing and Balance. 10. How to execute an emergency stop. ©Tim Hayes 2017

***Become your horse's leader with Natural Horsemanship***