

The Centered Position

Friday, May 28, 2010

Author: Jamison Wallace



There is Dressage, Western, Hunters, Jumpers, Eventing, Side Saddle and Saddle Seat, Endurance, Trail and Driving – all well defined styles of equine partnership. Different sorts and shapes of people use different breeds of horses for these equine pursuits. Loose legs, high hands, deep seats, tilted torsos, long legs, short stirrups, long reins – just imagine the multitude of position and form captured in these disciplines. What do they all have in common? Centered Riding.

Using the principles Sally Swift laid out: Soft Eyes, Breathing, Building Blocks, and Centering to achieve Grounding, you can be comfortable and correct galloping over uneven terrain, collecting the canter, cow sorting, barrel racing, at the slow gait, the tolt, leaping fences or driving the cones course.

Position is at the center of all styles of riding and driving and Centered Riding instructors around the world teach riders and drivers how to achieve the optimum position for each of the disciplines through the Four Basics and Grounding. So what is position? Think of it as the harmonious ability of the human body to follow and communicate with the equine body; this can be either in a saddle or on a carriage seat. Different styles of riding ask for modifications of position based on what we are asking of the horse and the kind of tack in which we ride/driver. The more upright, long legged positions of Dressage, Saddle seat and Western are not a fit for a 3'6" hunter course.

Your balance is predicated on your ability to keep all your body parts lined up and working together. Finding your center of gravity enables you to begin the process in achieving position. From your center radiate all your working parts: hips, legs, feet, abdomen, torso, shoulders, arms, hands, neck and head. The building blocks allow you to be aware of your body's alignment and how it affects, not only your movement, but your horse's. Fluid action in the hocks, shoulders, back and neck of the horse give it grace and beauty from the hair trigger reaction time of a great cow horse to the extended trot of Dressage. Both equine and human bodies require oxygen. Our need to breathe is an automatic function but effective breathing not only nourishes the blood but allows the muscles to relax, freeing the joints, and allows the brain to work calmly. So how do soft eyes fit into this position idea? Have you ever bumped into someone because you didn't see them even though they were just inches away from you? It's common in the grocery store when folks are concentrating on finding the right brand of XXX in the aisle and crash into someone's shopping cart! Soft eyes allow you to realize your full range of vision. As a "side effect" it helps release tension in the jaw and neck and allows you to breathe deeply.

If you combine centering, building blocks, breathing and soft eyes, you will be able to find grounding. This means your feet will always stay in the stirrups (or on the floor of the carriage) without pushing. You will feel as if you are standing with your feet underneath you, supporting you. Your body will feel joined and will move with the horse. The act of breathing will be deliberate and rhythmic in unison with the gait of the horse, and you will be able to see in front of you, above and below and to the sides while finding your path ahead.

Sally Swift understood the position of classical riding. She went ahead and gave us Four Basic tools and the concept of grounding to achieve that position. Centered Riding Instructors can and do teach all disciplines of riding and driving because all riding and driving is Centered.

