

Being a Balanced Partner with your Horse

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The theme of this year's Symposium will be "Centered Riding's Partner – the Horse". I am sure that all of us horse lovers have that "perfect horse" in our dreams. One with beauty and balance, rhythm, lightness and power - a horse that is confident, attentive and just a delight to ride.

It is important that we understand our partner, the horse. It is a creature born to live and run free and wild; yet it is kind enough to share its abilities with us. It is our responsibility to make our partner's job easy, free of pain and as pleasant as possible, such as when he is galloping, cutting cattle, in the jumper ring or competing in dressage. Here is where Centered Riding fits in. Centered Riding allows for maximum harmony between horse and rider in all circumstances and in all disciplines. Centered Riding is not about "what to do" with your horse. It is about "How to do" what is needed not only with your body but also with your horse's body in order to produce the greatest efficiency of movement for both of you.



Centered Riding is not a "style of riding. Western, Hunt Seat, and Dressage are all examples of riding. Rather, Centered Riding is a way of reeducating the mind and body towards greater balance and integration. Centered Riding gives you a new way of expressing the old classical principles of whatever style or riding you use. It is essential that horsemanship maintain the purity of these classical principles within each style and discipline. Centered Riding makes this easier to do.

As I indicate in my second book *Centered Riding 2 – Further Explorations*, it is important to remember that "a horse knows how to be a horse." In the first few days of his life, your horse learned how to trot, canter, and even pirouette. You do not need to teach him how to do these things. When you get on your horse's back, you change the situation for your horse. He now must balance himself efficiently with your weight on his back and respond to your aids. His ability to do this depends upon your carrying yourself in balance with him. A centered and

balanced rider with awareness of both her body and the body of the horse can help the horse develop correct musculature and move with balance and freedom of motion. The horse then has a chance to work in harmony with his rider and take pleasure in his work rather than develop stress and even pain.

Practicing Centered Riding can help you to transform your horse into your "dream horse." Through Centered Riding, you will improve your balance – forward, backward and sideways, learn to stay calm and mentally balanced even in stressful situations, develop the ability to use precise, comfortable and appropriate aids, and ride with positive intent.

Centered Riding will also help you develop an awareness of your horse, giving you the ability to understand his moods and responses. A horse expresses himself through his body movements. He can express pain, discomfort, tension and fatigue, confusion, fear and distrust, or he can express joy, trust, and enthusiasm. These are all emotions that your horse expresses through his body movements. The horse's expression through movement is a result of a combination of his body balance and his state of mind, both of which are deeply influenced by, and in many cases dependent upon you, the rider. This places an immense responsibility upon you as his rider. You must use your body in such a way that you do not interfere with his balance and movement, while at the same time, indicating your

intentions with clarity. Only when a horse is physically and mentally comfortable can he give you his maximum potential.

Remember the words of Xenophon (427 – 354BC), a Greek cavalry officer, writer and horseman famed most notably for his essays on horsemanship who wrote “For what the horse does under compulsion is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in it either, any more than if one should whip and spur a dancer.”

You will find that not until you are centered, balanced and in harmony with your own body will you be able to avoid interfering with the balance of your horse. Your horse can only move with his maximum efficiency if you the rider, are in balance and harmony on and with him. He can only move as well as you can.

Photo above - From Centered Riding 2 - Further Explorations. Sally is helping a rider to become balanced.