

NWHS 101 – October 2006 Issue  
**Dressage Equals Training**

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It never ceases to amaze me how as humans we can become so prejudice, judgmental, and narrow in our perceptions. We seem to buy into the things we think we know, and are convinced they are correct simply because of the environment, experiences, and teachings with which we have been acquainted, or to which we have been exposed. The idea of expanding our horizons and widening our thoughts is very hard for some of us, and concepts like diversity, change, and even work are difficult to enact. We become not only complacent passengers on our horses, but apathetic travelers in life, most comfortable just getting by without really working at the journey.

How does all this relate to horsemanship? I bring this somewhat negative philosophy up for two reasons. First, I often have heard “Western” type riders criticizing “Dressage” type riders for everything from their equipment to the type of horses they ride. Equally as often, I personally have been defined as a “Western” rider simply because of the costume I wear, never looking at the principles to which I adhere in my horsemanship. A narrow perspective and definition develops, and the next thing you know, “Dressage-types” can’t even communicate to “Western-types” because of these perceived differences. A huge opportunity to grow as aspiring horseman is subsequently missed!

The second reason I am challenging your paradigms, is that I think we forget at times that in order to grow, develop, and finesse our horsemanship skills we must use that four-letter word...WORK! (And, as my 93 yr. old Father relays...It takes work combined with another four letter word...LOVE!) Building a relationship and constructing a beautiful dance between horse and rider takes discipline, thinking, and a lot of practice. I have met a few truly gifted horses and humans in my life, but for most of us, we need to continue to study, labor, and practice in order to find the ultimate ride.

Here’s where I think the “Dressage” folks really make sense for me. The word “Dressage” does not connote a specific costume for riding, nor does it describe a particular type of horse to be used. Rather the word simply means...*training*, or more specifically, the *discipline of training*. In this definition you could “Dressage” your dog, or we could have bovine “Dressage”! (I can see the movie now...The Cow Whisperer, or Dances with Cows!) For thousands of years the Native Americans, European, Mongolian, and Arab counties have been intensely studying and training horses. In the process they have developed a set of training programs or levels that ultimately help to develop both horse and rider gymnastically and for specific jobs. In our “Western” costume, or our “Endurance” costume, we need to take on the work-ethic of our cultural friends, and learn from the training programs they have developed over time.



Conditioning the horse in self-carriage, being vigilant of our posture, developing the horse according to his muscle and mental progression are but a few of the characteristics we all could learn from the discipline of “Dressage”.

Now this is not to say that I don’t think there some attributes to the traditional “Western” philosophies that could be shared with our friends pursuing the dressage level program. In my experience, I have encountered few rather snobby “Dressage-types” who end up being the most unsafe horse and humans to be around! These folks seem to have forgotten the concept of space, respect, and the principles of good horsemanship. After endless drilling, with every aid as tight as a drum, the horse thinks the only reward is their hot alfalfa hay after accomplishing mindless circles. Do you think those horses might relish a day out “hacking” along a mountain trail, or chasing cows across a field? I do. We need to find ways to develop the discipline of training our horses and ourselves, without turning it into a drill, a mindless game, or an activity that is solely about winning the points, the ribbon, or the money.

Well, how’s that for an article that went array on philosophy? Not much “how to” or “try this” in this month’s 101 writings. So here’s my closing thought from the pulpit of Alice Trindle...Horsemanship is not defined by the costume you wear, the horse you ride, or the area you live. Good horsemanship is universal in that it comes from the heart of the horse and is channeled through the heart of the man. And if we dig deep enough and work hard at the discipline of training, we can discover a partner in the horse that will limit our prejudices and our negative judgements to create a lifelong journey of learning, fun, and joy! It takes work to be an aspiring horseman. Enjoy the journey!



Check out other articles and thoughts by Alice Trindle at: [www.tnthorsemanship.com](http://www.tnthorsemanship.com)

Suggested Reading:

**Kinship with All Life** by J. Allen Boone **The Four Agreements** – A Practical Guide to Person Freedom by Don Miguel Ruiz  
**Dressage – A Study of the Finer Points of Riding** by Henry Wynmalen  
**Horses & Their Riders** by Nuno Oliveira

