

## Can you have a Ranch Horse and a Dressage Horse?

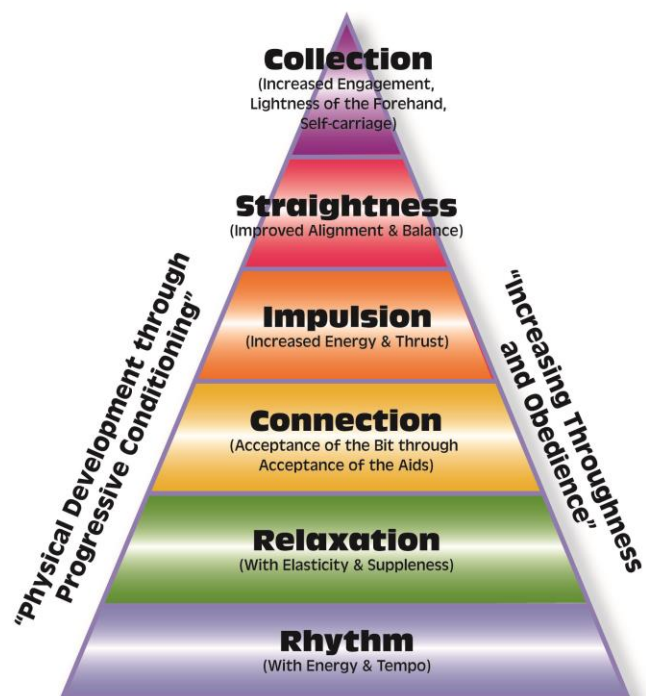
Over the course of the last ten to fifteen years I have had the amazing good fortune to get to know and study with one our current Master Horsemen, Ms. Bettina Drummond. As a student of Nuno Oliveria, a scholar in the subject of Classical Dressage, and a perpetual seeker of a deep relationship with her horses, Bettina's knowledge is unequalled. In 2012 she came out West with her Quarterhorse stallion to acquaint him with his "Western" heritage and to further her study of the comparisons between Classical Dressage and true Vaquero traditions and training. I had a marvelous time riding the mountains of eastern Oregon, playing with cows, and having long discussions with Bettina in comparing our western horsemanship jobs and relationships with our horses with her background in true Classical Dressage.

One of my over-arching goals was to seek an answer to the question of whether or not I could bring along my horses to accomplish the jobs necessary on the ranch, but still adhere to the principles of the Classical Dressage training scale. (i.e. Note these aspects vary slightly in order and have different interpretations given differences in languages: Rhythm, Suppleness/Relaxation, Contact, Straightness, Engagement/Impulsion, and Collection) See articles regarding use of the Training Scale at: [www.tnthorsemanship.com/articles](http://www.tnthorsemanship.com/articles)

Now I am by no means a scholar regarding the bio-mechanics required of the horse/human team to accomplish any job on the ranch or on the dressage court. However, these bio-mechanical requirements seem to be the foundation for discussion when comparing the maneuvers necessary. So let's look at what is required in both pursuits and compare.

**Self-Carriage & Longevity:** All of us want a good horse to be with us for a long time. Ask any cowboy and he will have stories of an 'ol faithful that could turn on a dime and give you back change. He can tell you of the miles he covered and how the horse could spend a whole day chasing cows and come back tomorrow for even more. Ask any dressage horseman and they will recite memories of the horse that could perform canter pirouettes and effortless tempi changes. While attitude is a key ingredient in these horses, it is coupled with over-all health and ultimately the horse's ability to carry himself in balance in every task that is asked of them. Therefore, a key ingredient in not only longevity but performance for both the ranch and dressage horse is self-carriage. It appears to me that the ability of the horse to engage their core muscles, release the back, while isolating and engaging the

## Pyramid of Training



hindquarters, is a bio-mechanical quality necessary in both pursuits. Equally so, it is important for the human to possess self-carriage and good posture in order to stay in balance with the horse.

The comparison of human posture between the two worlds does seem to have some discrepancies. It is unfortunate that I often witness a deplorable lack of concern for good posture and its study, in the western ranch horse riders. If only more time and study were given by these humans to how their posture effects the movements of the horse, I believe we would see an amazing lightness and thereby, self-carriage come into the ranch horse world.

### Pyramid for the Rider

Combination of all aspects into a brilliant dance!

Finesse of Aids

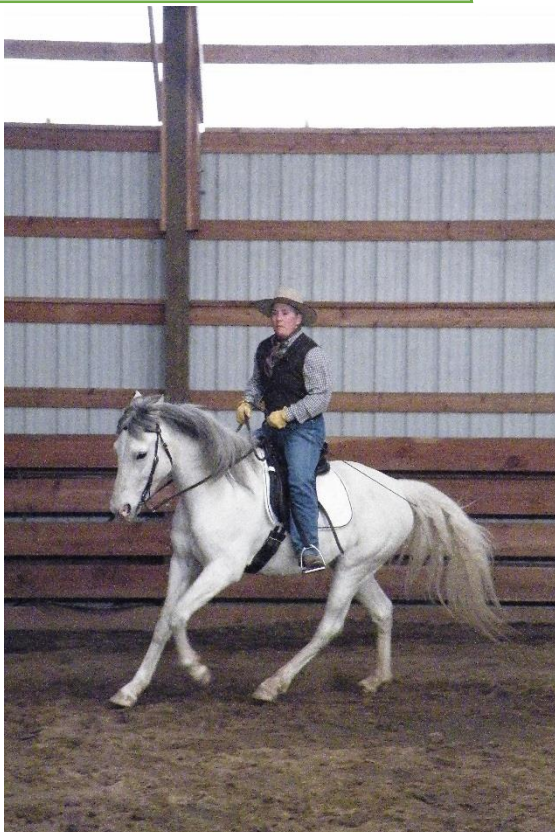
Understanding & Applying Combination of aids

Relaxed, yet active hips & understanding of movement

Attitude, Leadership & Balance in Seat

Agility and Engagement: With self-carriage as a prerequisite for truly developing 'feel' in both the ranch and dressage horse, what of the differences in their agility and engagement allowing one horse to be capable of both types of work? Here I see some differences in how the self-carriage is applied, particularly in the shoulders and hocks.

When working a cow in the western United States, we primarily set it up with the horse on offense and the cow on defense. In this posturing, the horse may need to be lower in the shoulders to become more at eye level with the cow. His hocks are engaged underneath the torso, to allow for agile movements to ultimately effect the position and movement of the cow.



In the dressage maneuvers, such as shoulder-in and half-pass postures, or in work such as extending the trot or canter pirouette, the shoulders must be higher to allow for the engagement of the hindquarters. The core muscles are utilized in a slightly different manner than in the cow horse-type maneuvers. A visual example of this is illustrated in watching the Doma Vaquera horse working a bull that would like to tear the horse's side wide open. Compare the fore and aft balances of the DV bull fighting horse, with that of the cutting horse. The Doma Vaquera horse is on the defense and must be capable of eluding the horns of the bull. Therefore, the shoulders have to be up, out of the way, and allow the hindquarters to engage to very quickly catapult the horse and rider in a balanced, agile movement away from the bull.

In this comparison regarding agility and the need for engagement, I want to be clear that I am not advocating a continual use of the hock action required in cutting horse-type of maneuvers. That type of stress would negate our first mutual desire to create a horse that will

live a long time due to the fostering of self-carriage. I believe the bio-mechanical muscular development required by the Classical Dressage training is very suited for our ranch horses. I may not turn-back the cow in a cutting horse-type posture, but I will accomplish the task with finesse and in a more "Classical" balance. At the end of the day, I will have a horse with stamina, longevity, and good hocks.

So, can I have a ranch horse during the week and a dressage horse on the weekend? Absolutely! By schooling in true Classical Dressage balances, you will enhance the lightness, self-carriage, along with rhythm, timing, and carriage of your ranch horse. The jobs of the ranch will bring new purpose to the schooling of the dressage horse. If our ultimate vision is the development of a partnership with our horses based on lightness and mutual respect, then the label of "Ranch" or "Dressage" really doesn't matter much to the horse...nor should it matter to his human.

