

Alice Trindle Presents:

Developing a Willing Partnership

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five brothers. She learned to ride behind the back of the saddle holding on to her brother's belt loops. In the past 15 years Alice has continued her relationship with horses, and had the opportunity to study with several true horsemen such as Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt, Dennis Reis, and Bettina Drummond. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho, and offers multi-day horsemanship retreats at her ranch in eastern Oregon.

Developing the Dance

Combining the Ground Skills

Clinic #3 in a series of ten

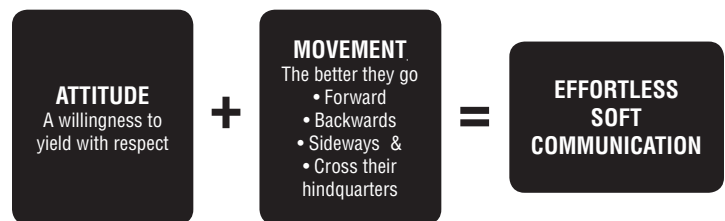
Developing the Dance... Combining Ground Skills

In the past two clinics we have begun to lay the foundation for the ultimate dance of horsemanship. Here are a few key points to ponder before you start developing the dance by combining the skills you and your horse have been practicing:

First... Remember your "Horseman's Protocol":

- Become Present
- Think & Visualize
- Focus, which prepares your Posture
- Allow & Reward

Second... Be mindful of the two basic filters through which communication occurs:



Third... As you begin a set or combination of skills, add to your picture how you will accomplish them with balance, rhythm, and perfect timing.

OK... Let's Dance!

The Western Swing – Start by driving your horse forward on a circle to the LEFT on the end of your 12-foot lead attached to the horseman's halter. You may also want to have an extension of your arm, such as a dressage whip in the hand closest to his tail. Keep him at a walk for now, and later try the dance starting in a trot. Watch for a soft eye and ear, arcing in the direction of travel, with the outside feet tracking up on the outside of the circle, and the inside pair doing the same on the inside of the circle. (Examine illustration No. 1)



1

Next, change your focus for sideways on a circle, nose in/hips out, with the energy moving from the inside hind to the outside shoulder. To accomplish this, draw the lead rope through your hand that is closest to the horse's nose (left hand in this case), as you move your toes, belly button, and body more towards the shoulders. Extend your whip to compress the air, inviting the crossing/balancing movement of the legs (review the positioning as we practiced in Clinic #1 – Leg yield or shoulder-in Posture on a Circle). When you and the horse are flowing nicely, sideways on a circle, begin to feed the halter lead back out to your horse, asking him to again pick up the lead, straight on a circle. Don't stop walking! This is a nice little dance combo all by itself! It is a great exercise for helping to keep the shoulders up on your horse, and it requires you to develop feel and timing, while keeping the rhythm of the walk or trot.



2

Now the fun really begins...

As you drive your horse forward on a circle, pushing your energy up and around the arc, check to see that you have prepared by having the lead rope in the left hand and your whip in the right hand. Continue walking forward on a circle, and with the tip of your whip, draw an imaginary half-circle on your horse's side, starting at his tail, and ending by placing the whip in your left hand, along with the halter lead. Keep Walking! Now, make an "OK" sign in right hand, and draw the same half-circle on the side of the horse, repeating the motion starting at his tail. As your "OK" sign meets up with the lead rope, open the "O" and place the lead inside. You are now continuing to walk forward on a circle with the lead and whip in the left hand, & your right around the lead rope, ahead of the left hand. Here comes the Swing...

Begin to straighten your right forearm, directing your energy towards the horse's inside hindquarters (See Illustration No. 2). This is accomplished by feeling first for the inside or left eye, then for the inside left hind foot to cross under the horse's belly. Your focus has changed from driving the rib cage up and around, to your belly button and arm moving

towards that inside hind left leg. You are inviting the horse to cross his hindquarters (left leg under to a balance up on the right hind). You are encouraging him to bring his nose in front of your belly button, until he has exchanged eyes, and has presented you now with his RIGHT eye or the outside of the bend. Keep walking! Bring your left hand up, with the whip placed vertical within it and your right hand up to push the eye for a finish of a one-eighth turn-on-the-haunches. (See Illustration No. 3) The hindquarters should pretty much stay in one place or pivot, as the left leg reaches to the left and the right front leg crosses over, in a smooth "reach-cross-reach" rhythm. When you first start the Western Swing dance, settle for just a small, one-eighth to one-quarter turn-on-the-haunches. As you progress, carry this up into a complete spin...first slow, then faster, then slow again! (Note: You can break this whole dance down into pieces, and put stops or half-halts between each move. The ultimate is to accomplish the dance with no break in the rhythm. However, DON'T RUSH!!! The preparations to the transitions are still there... just imperceptible. (See Illustration No. 4)



3

Here are some situations you may run into as you seek to dance the Western Swing...

- "My horse stops, and I feel like I am having to pull on his eye and really push on his hip." A couple of things might be happening. First, you have to keep walking, or carrying your energy with a flow. It's hard, because you have to separate body parts, with rhythm, while keeping a picture in mind of what you are asking for. Second, check in on your horse's attitude. If his eyes and ears are not tracking up and wanting to follow your suggestions, you need to go back and work his feet more on the four basic movements, before you try the dance combinations.

- “When I get to the turn-on-the-haunches, my horse is still walking forward, or even pivoting on his forehead, and then moving his hindquarters.” We want his energy to continue on the arch of the left circle, but somehow we have to shift his weight slightly back onto his right hind foot. Two suggestions: First, keep your body and both hands positioned on the outside eye, and slightly ahead of the arc. Second, remember your lead rope hand, left in this case, can send a little energy backwards, through the horse’s chest to help shift his weight to the hindquarters.
- “My horse changes his bend when I ask for the turn-on-the-haunches, and begins to move sideways.” This is a big one that WE cause! Remember that in the turn-on-the-haunches the nose follows the direction of the spin, the direction of travel, and the movement of the inside front foot (i.e. left in this example). Review the two suggestions above for your positioning and keep in mind that at first ask for only a small, one-eighth pivot. Continue to build on that with a mindfulness towards “slow and right” beating “fast and out of balance” every time!



4

Western Swing is just one combination of ground skill maneuvers that you can develop with your horse. In our clinics we have a number of other dances from “Flap the Stirrup & Pull the Tail” to “Ride’n the Lines”. There is no limit to the combinations! Add in your style, and call it your own! As you hop on board, apply these same combinations of skills in the saddle. I bet they will happen easily, because you and your horse already know the dance. TNT