

Riding With Rhythm  
Ocala Horse Conference  
September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009

A free horse moving around the pasture moves with a certain elegance, balance and rhythm. They appear to float across the ground, stop, turn and change leads in an effortless, fluid motion. Our goal as riders is to be able to communicate subtly to allow the horse to demonstrate the balance, rhythm, and elegance that it has naturally, while we sit in the saddle. A horse that does things on their own lacks the stiffness, animation and indecisiveness that is typically seen in many horse disciplines. If we can communicate so subtly that the horse can move with its own natural balance and elegance then the quality of movement, maneuvers and stress levels of the horse and the rider will be reduced.

In our journey to find balance, rhythm and elegance in the horse, we must start first by riding with rhythm. We have to understand the horses' foot falls, the saddle movements associated with those foot falls, and we have to learn to ride in the flow with the horse's natural movement. There are a lot of exercises we can do to develop our riding skill and to learn to move our hips and legs in rhythm with the horse. To develop a good horse, we must first become excellent riders.

Rhythm is critical in training the horse. In all training, we basically develop the horses' responsiveness in his head and face, his shoulder, and his hip. As we develop control of each part of the horse, we want that control to be rhythmic so that the horse steps with the appropriate leg in each maneuver and our asking and pressure is in rhythm. We will use rhythmic pressure to encourage each of the different parts of the horse to respond as we developing control. Ultimately, we want our asking/cueing to be in rhythm with the horse's movement.

Each of the maneuvers that we teach, of course, has a unique rhythm. The rhythm of each gait is unique and we need to move and handle the horse in rhythm with that gait. The stop is taught by simply stopping the rhythm of the body and the hand and allowing the horse to find the stop. Continue that practice until the horse develops a rhythm for the stop. The back is the same gait as the trot and the rhythm of the back is much like the trot rhythm from the saddle. We will use our hands, legs, and seat in rhythm with the legs when backing the horse to encourage movement of the appropriate legs and to add speed or more direction. As we teach the turn, or guide, we are basically developing shoulder control. We want the inside front leg to be reaching toward the desired direction and the outside front leg to be stepping over and across the inside front leg. We will encourage independently with our hand and outside leg to teach the horse to step over and across. As we work to control and improve the gaits of the horse, we want to be able to push the hip up under the horse and potentially restrict the face in order to create more rhythm and elegance in the various gaits. Teaching leads and lead changes is simply a matter of improving hip control and allowing the horse to find the rhythm of the maneuver. The rhythm of our asking will determine the quality of change we make and the relaxation of the horse.

One of the most important aspects of utilizing the horses' rhythm is to learn to influence that rhythm. Ultimately, we want to be able to have speed control, thereby increasing or decreasing the rhythm or cadence of the maneuver. Preparatory signals will

allow the horse to find rhythm on their own and ultimately allow the horse the freedom to execute flawless maneuvers while using its own natural balance and rhythm.

As a horseman, we have to learn to allow excellence in the horse. Many times when excellence is demanded, they become stiff and obedient rather than fluid and rhythmic. Therefore, once we have taught the horse the basic maneuvers and skills desired, we simply want to ask, become a passenger, and allow the horse to find its own rhythm in the maneuvers desired. The ultimate goal is to have the horse do everything desired as though they had thought of it themselves thereby capturing the horses' natural elegance, balance and rhythm. By being a better rider, asking in rhythm with the horse, we can rely on the horse to demonstrate its innate ability and show the elegance and rhythm of a horse at play.