

Snobby English Rider and the **Ignorant Cowboy**

By Danee Rudy

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When my husband, Davin, and I first started working horses together we had such different backgrounds that we had trouble trying to coexist. I was a typical jumper rider- I had great riding technique and concerned myself with things like making sure my horse was on the bit, being able to lengthen and shorten his stride, and my own equitation. My husband, on the other hand, used horses for ranch work- what the horse moved or looked like meant nothing if it couldn't work a cow, trailer easily, and tie anywhere.

I was giving my Thoroughbred jumper a bath, with a chain across her face while she danced in circles- it was the only way I knew. Well, I could see Davin looked annoyed. Finally he asked me why I didn't teach my horse to ground tie. This shocked me! It truly never occurred to me that such a thing could be taught- I honestly thought Quarter Horses were just so lazy they didn't go anywhere! I was accustomed to a show barn where horses came in, learned to accept the rider's aids and jump courses, and were sold. The horses were very 'hot' while being ridden and few were pleasant in the barn.

It was probably later in the same week when Davin was riding one of my horses. I was always impressed that he sat pretty well... for a cowboy. But that day his riding drove me nuts. "Straighten him," I shouted.

"Huh?" was the reply I got back.

"His hindquarters are traveling a foot to the right of his shoulders. Make him go straight!" I said.

Davin looked at me bewildered, "What are you talking about?!" He had absolutely no idea that the horse was practically crossing his hind legs.

I once heard that Western riders should never watch English riders, and English riders should never watch Western riders because they might learn something. While I hate to argue with this pearl of wisdom it is simply not true- I had watched western riders many times before falling in love with one, and I never realized what they had that I lacked. Their horses were calmer than mine- cattle moving, chutes banging and ropes swirling above the heads of these horses didn't mean a thing to them. My horse spooked at leaves. These horses knew their job and did it with hardly any instruction or reminders- I micro managed my horse every step. Yet all I saw watching those cowboys was a bunch of men in 'chair seats' with their legs in a horrible position and their horses' backs tight and necks inverted. Had those same guys watched me ride, chances are they would not have cared one bit how well I sat or how nicely my horse held her neck and back. They would have wondered why my horse was so spooky or why I couldn't canter on a loose rein.

But love sees the good in all, and soon I realized that my husband knew a form of horsemanship I had never been exposed to. He taught me how to lead a horse- yes how to lead. I had ridden at some of the biggest horse shows in the country, yet in his opinion I couldn't lead a horse to the pasture. I would hold the lead three inches from the halter, giving the horse no freedom and no confidence. When I started holding the lead rope three feet away my horse suddenly was able to respect my personal space and felt more comfortable- she spooked a little less often. I learned more and more about what we today call 'natural horsemanship' and I now see it as the most important thing I

do.

My husband learned how critical it is for a horse to travel with a relaxed topline. He learned to control his horse's shoulders and hips and not just her nose. He now understands biomechanics and knows that the horse's physical comfort relies on the correct posture of horse and human.. Davin is now a stickler on saddle fit and dentistry and can even be seen practicing lateral movements.

Now I have the opinion that everyone has something to offer whether they ride English or Western, or drive, or do circus tricks, or train dolphins or raise kids for that matter. Wherever I go I look for little nuggets of knowledge that I might apply to my horsemanship.

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