

Just Horse ~ Series No. 1 - 2016

Lesson Plans to Develop a Relationship

Have you ever noticed that riding with a purpose is not only more enjoyable for you, but your horse seems to react and respond with more enthusiasm? If I have some cows to gather or a new trail to explore, I see the ears on my horse coming alert, her walk picks up, she is in perfect balance, and together we work as a team to accomplish this new job or adventure. My very favorite spring time activity is riding out into the pasture to separate the cows and their new baby calves from those mothers that have yet to calve. My horses truly enjoy the work too, with their mothering instincts rising up as we shepherd the newborns along one step at a time until their baby tails go straight in the air and they burst off in what looks like sheer joy! What fun to have a purpose...a job...a lesson plan for me and for my horse!

In the next series of articles we are going to discuss a set of lessons plans that you can accomplish to keep that type of enthusiasm in both horse and rider, while building on the basics of rhythm, timing, balance, focus, collection, engagement and ultimately feel. We will give you a collection of specific exercises, through which you can pick and choose, in an effort to keep your lesson plans fresh, without drilling, and keep both you and your horse looking forward to the job of training with joy!

Here's the overarching game plan: Develop a set of exercises that build on the basics, to ultimately help horse and rider have effortless communication to accomplish many possible jobs and further the process of training.

You have heard me comment many times in the past: The better your horse goes forward, backwards, cross their hind quarters, and go sideways...The BETTER they will accomplish whatever you are asking of them! So the question is...How do I get my horse to become **better** at these basic movements, without drilling on the same set of exercises and patterns? How do I create fun jobs for my horse, when I don't have cows to gather, a trail to ride, or baby calves to nuzzle along? The answer is to first be creative, second to use the age-old, classical dressage training triangle to further develop your basic movements into a brilliant dance, and finally **develop a clear lesson plan**.

Classical Dressage Training Triangle

Lightness & Brilliance!

Collection & Engagement

Swung & Impulsion

Contact or Connection

Balance & Suppleness

The Three to Five Day Lesson Plan

Day One: Exercises that are accomplished on straight lines

Day Two: Exercises that are accomplished with lateral movements

Three-Five: Exercises that are used to combine the basics to accomplish Cowboy or Doma Vaquera or Classical Dressage moves & patterns

Executing the Three – Five Day Lesson Plan

In developing a training regime that builds on the elements of the “Classical Dressage Training Triangle”- I look at varying my specific exercises into three basic categories or **DAILY FOCUS AREAS**:

Day 1 - Straight Lines

Here are the specific goals I aim to achieve within the training scheme, as I execute the “Straight Line” Day:

Focus – Always important for each training day! Included in this huge word is my Horseman’s Protocol (Become present; Think & picture; Allow; Reward), plus watching the eyes and ears of my horse to see that he is focused and ready to work

Rhythm – Exercises will include movements that work on: Rating, speed changes within the gait, and changes of gait

Balance - Exercises will include: Riding “perfect” circles or a Straight Line on a circle with the inside feet tracking up on the inside of the railroad track, and the outside pair of feet tracking up on the outside of the track. This simple exercise is VERY difficult! In order for this to happen correctly the body of both horse and rider needs to be in balance, with rhythm and focus.

Collection & Engagement –Exercises to be employed will build towards our horse developing first self-carriage, then freedom in their back muscles called *Swung*, and finally implementing a light collection with the hindquarters engaging from behind.

Day 2 –Lateral Movements

Goals we will accomplish through Lateral Maneuvers:

Focus – Again, focus is a critical component in everyday of training, but on the Lateral Day we will learn to become more geometrical in diagramming in our mind’s eye, the pattern we are asking the horse to accomplish, and the necessity of preparing our body to focus on that pattern ahead of time.

Rhythm and Timing – Lateral movements will greatly improve our ability to know “where” the feet are in all gaits, but also to develop the knowledge to understand “when” to influence where the feet and body goes.

An equally important aspect of training *the horse* to develop rhythm and timing, is the component that develops the same qualities in *the human*! A good horseman is a great dancer!

Balance – Of the three training days, the Lateral Movement Day is by far the one that works on balance and straightness the most. For leg yield and half pass postures to work in concert with rhythm, timing, and focus, both horse and rider must be in balance flowing with the movement.

Day 3 – 4 and 5 – Cowboy, Doma Vaquera, and Classical Dressage

These are the fun days where you combine the skills you have been honing in the Straight Day and the Lateral Day, to actually do a job. (Or at least accomplish an imaginary one!)

Cowboy Day – On this day you will play with combined maneuvers you would need on the ranch, such as roll backs, ¼ and ½ turn on the haunches, canter departures, flying lead changes, herd work, and mirror image games.

Doma Vaquera – Similar to the Cowboy Day, today you work the bulls from horse-back! Our lateral work becomes essential to save the life of ourselves and our horse. We develop a quick stop to a quick backup, and then the ability to ride off on a loose rein with the horse and rider in complete relaxation.

Classical Dressage Day – We will ride the patterns developed by centuries of training, to further develop our horse, ourselves, and our partnership, by selecting dressage tests to execute.

Here’s how it will work...

For the next several months I will give you specific exercises to practice within the three to five day training schedule. It is a series of lesson plans for you and your horse. You may not have the luxury of riding five-days per week, but it will still give you some specific goals to accomplish every ride opportunity. You will have a clear purpose, and your horse will appreciate the clarity, consistency, and ultimately look forward to the work!

Just Horse ~ Series No. 2 - 2016

Lesson Plans to Develop a Relationship

Last month we started a series of articles that give us a road map for exercises to accomplish with your horse. By having a lesson plan as we work with your horses several excellent results will happen:

First, it requires us to have forethought and awareness, which sets it up for us to become good leaders.

Second, for most humans and all horses, consistency and clarity are key components in not only our ability to succeed, but also to happiness.

Third, while consistency is certainly critical, a lesson plan also gives us permission to change it up and experiment within a set of principles based on the biomechanics and attitudes of both horse and human. In other words, once I know the basic recipe and the “What-Where-When-Why-How’s” of how prepare the recipe, I can begin to make it my own by experimenting with other ingredients or combination of materials. That’s when the fun-factor really goes up for both the human and the horse!

So, let’s get started with a suggested your lesson plans for the next month...

(Note: You can find articles and Tip for the Ride videos that describe these maneuvers and exercises on Alice’s website: www.tnhorsemanship.com or give her a call at: 541-856-3356)

Day One - Straight

Ground School:

Forward & backing on a circle

Riding:

Ride actual straight lines & circles with changes of pace/speed within each gait (i.e. fast walk, medium walk, slow walk; Fast trot, medium trot, slow trot; Fast canter, medium canter, slow canter)

Day Two - Lateral

Ground School:

Sideways or shoulder-in on a circle; Counter-bend on large circle (shoulders move faster than hips)

Riding:

Counter or reverse bends in each corner;
Leg yield on diagonal from quarter-line to track

Day Three

Cowboy

Ground School:

Western Swing and backing on a circle

Riding:

Leg yield away from the wall to a roll back (1/2 turn towards the wall);

Circle to a smaller circle to a forward turn on the haunches

Day Four

Doma Vaquera

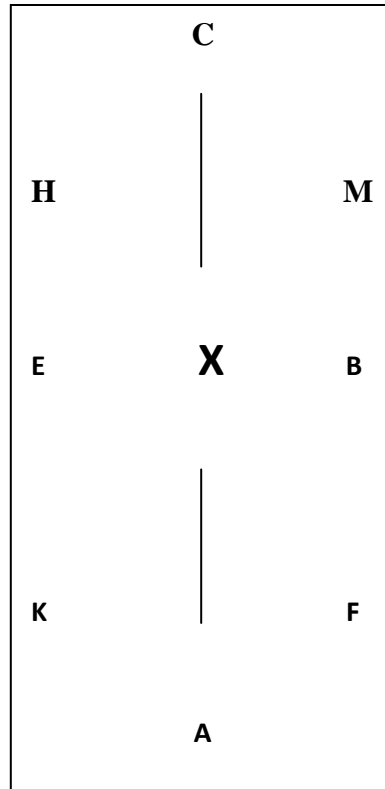
Ground School: In

“ground riding” position, work on halt to backup

Riding: After warm-up of both straight and lateral movements...halt to backup to trot and then to canter departures

Day Five – Dressage Test

1	A X	Enter working trot Halt at X, Salute Proceed working trot
2	C E	Track left Circle left 20m
3	Between K & A	Working canter left lead
4	B	Circle left 20m
5	Between centerline & B	Working trot
6	C C-H	Medium walk Medium walk
7	HXF F-A	Free walk Medium walk
8	A	Working trot
9	E	Circle right 20m
10	Between H&C	Working canter right lead
11	B	Circle right 20m
12	Between centerline & B	Working trot
13	A X	Down centerline Halt at X, Salute



A to X to C is the “Centerline”

Just Horse ~ Series No. 3 - 2016

Lesson Plans to Develop a Relationship

Several years ago at a clinic in Washington State, I had the opportunity to learn a valuable lesson about human nature, and horse-human relationships. It was the final day of a five day clinic and I thought I had been communicating a consistent set of over-arching goals and presenting a clear set of exercises to accomplish them. This particular morning we were working on a balanced turn on center in our ground work and then transferring that feeling, flow, and balance up into the saddle. I needed to leave the arena for a short time, and turned to one of the participants to ask them to take over for a period. The young lady I queried, who had been accomplishing the exercises effortlessly, said to me with all sincerity, "What are we working on?" At first I was a little angry and upset to think we had been working on a set of principles for five days, had been applying very specific exercises to practice these goals, and yet she had no verbal or pictorial idea of what we were working on, nor perhaps **why** we were accomplishing them! Once I settled down, I realized some valuable lessons that have since served me very well in my personal life and in helping others to develop a willing partnership with their horses.

- 1) **In life, and with horses, don't be afraid to ask...WHY?** In the scenario above, if the young lady had simply been more persistent in asking for clarification on why we were accomplishing certain exercises, and how it all related to our goals, then perhaps she would have been more clear and consistent in requesting those maneuvers from her horse, plus being confident in taking over the class instruction.
- 2) **Become your own best teacher!** As we have discussed many times, your horse is looking for your good leadership. Your ability to develop feel, timing, balance, and lightness is directly related to your understanding and practice of preparation, thought, focus, self-carriage, and posture. Developing a "Horseman's Protocol" is critical to your success in communicating to the horse. He is looking to you for clarity, consistency, compassion, understanding, patience, and forgiveness. All qualities of a good leader and a good teacher!
- 3) **Give yourself and your horse the gift of TIME!** Unfortunately in our current human world, time seems to be something in very short supply. Ask anyone "How are you doing?" and the answer will be, "I am so busy, and I just don't seem to have enough time." With this as the backdrop, it is very difficult to have a relationship with horses when their instincts relate to 'time' through their herd senses. They know when it is time to eat, play, sleep, and flight for their safety. In all of these essentials for their daily life, 'horse time' is still greatly dictated by the leader of the herd. Give yourself the time it takes to become present, think about what you are asking of your horse, visualize the perfect outcome, and allow the time for both you and the horse to accomplish the picture. In this process – the process of developing a 'Horseman's Protocol' - you will give the horse the time to recognize your leadership qualities.
- 4) **Plan your work...Work your plan!** Good teachers utilize well-constructed lesson plans. They have seen the end result at the beginning, and they work backwards from that perfect picture to give the student the tools to constantly reinforce their vision. They are willing to set it up, and wait for the slightest try in the right direction, and then to reward that progress. A set of lesson plans have at their foundation, principles or goals that ultimately combine to create a wonderful knowledge base for both student and teacher. With horses, and perhaps people, when we join together to share this wisdom, it creates a beautiful dance that is truly brilliant.

As you move forward with accomplishing the lesson plans I am suggesting in this series of articles, keep the principles listed above in mind. It's really pretty simple...but not easy! Try to **not** find your horse asking you what my young client did years ago, "What are we working on?"!

Quick Review

We are looking to develop a Three to Five Day Lesson Plan with specific focus areas each day to ultimately accomplish specific training goals.

Training Goals	Straight Day	Lateral Day	Cowboy Day	Doma Vaquera	Dressage
Focus & Purpose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rhythm & Timing	✓	✓			✓
Balance & Suppleness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contact or Connection	✓	✓		✓	✓
Swung & Impulsion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collection & Engagement	✓	✓		✓	✓
Lightness & Brilliance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Day One - Straight

Ground School: Square penning – Both at liberty & on the

long line (Note: Shoulders stay balanced, corners are square)

Riding:

After your ground school and supple exercises on board:

Long-side / Short-side Rating Exercises:

*Rising trot medium on long-side to sitting trot slow on short-side;

*Extended trot on diagonal, to sitting trot medium on short-side, to rising trot medium on long-side

*Serpentine (Picture subway sandwich on top of subway sandwich!) Ride in consistent gate or ask for slowing through the middle of the school or increase rate through the middle & slow on the corners

*Figure 8's (Picture donut on top of donut) Alternate gate, alternate rate within the gate from circle to new circle, perfectly

Day Two - Lateral

Ground School:

Work-in-Hand positioning (Note: With the Work-in-Hand you now have the advantage of the outside – support rein)

*Shoulder-in on a circle to a leg yield to the wall to a back up

*Shoulder-in on a square

*Shoulder-in to counter or reverse bend on a large circle

*At the wall, ask for a haunches-in

Riding:

After supple exercises while riding, and the counter bends from last month's drills –

*Bow tie = Tracking left, pick up a right bend at the end of the long-side; Ride a ½ circle counter bend; Ride straight several strides, then leg-yield to the wall; Ride forward now tracking right; In the corner pick up a left bend; Ride a ½ circle counter bend; Straight for several strides, then leg yield

Day Three

Cowboy

Ground School:

Ground riding to ½ Swing - Ground ride with your horse tracking left (your horse will be on your right); Direct your horse with your left hand on the lead around to his left & in front of you; Reach in with your right hand on the lead to cross his hindquarters, then move his forequarters to your right; Progress on in ground riding position, but now the horse in on your left; Repeat the opposite direction

Riding:

(Don't forget to practice last month's drills and supple exercises)

*Accomplish the same pattern/maneuver on board as you did in your ground school (Forward, small ½ circle, cross hindquarter, bring front end across for ¼ turn on the haunches)

Day Four

Doma Vaquera

Ground School: In "ground riding" position, work on halt to backup; Add variety: Backup fast, then depart at a trot; Backup slow, then rock forward, then rock back – Can you get the horse to mirror your every move?

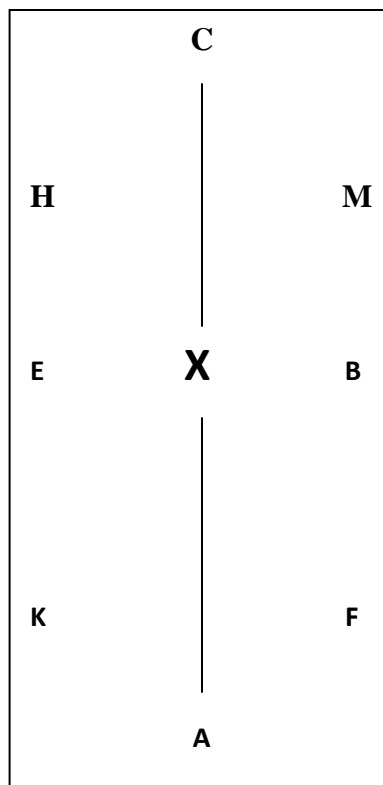
Riding: After warm-up of utilizing previous straight and lateral day movements, and of course suppleness...

*Ride the 'Bow Tie' pattern, but carry the reverse or counter bend a little further on the circle (just shy of ¾'s); Change your aids to ask for the canter (Outside leg goes from relaxed to slightly back; Inside leg, hip, and hand comes slightly forward – No casting of the shoulders and think about cantering off on a straight line)

**Day Five – Dressage Test
Training Level 4**

A to X to C is the “Centerline”

A	X	Enter working trot Halt at X, Salute Proceed working trot
C	MXF	Track right One loop
3	Between A & K	Working canter right lead
4	E	Circle right 20m
5	E-H	Working canter
6	H	Working trot
7	C	Medium walk
C-M		Medium walk
8	MXK K-A	Free Walk Medium Walk
9	A FXM	Working trot One loop
10	Between C & H	Working canter left lead
11	E	Circle left 20m
12	E-K	Working Canter
13	K	Working trot
14	B	Circle left 20m rising trot, allowing the horse to stretch forward & downward
	Before B	Shorten the reins
15	B	Working trot
16	E X G	Turn left Turn left Halt, Salute



Just Horse ~ Series No. 4 - 2016

Lesson Plans to Develop a Relationship

Recently I had the opportunity to travel into the central part of Oregon to evaluate a horse that could possibly work well into the family of several of my clients. She was a beautiful Hispano-Arab, who had been clearly well cared-for, and was happy to do her work as it had been presented to her so far in her seven years of life. It had been a long time since I was in this situation, where I was a third-person observer and hands-on evaluation didn't happen until later in the session. Most of the time when I am asked to evaluate a horse, it is on my home territory, with my favorite tools at hand. (i.e. Round pen, lariat, lunge & dressage whip, flag, bridge, car wash, etc.!) Here I found myself watching, listening, examining (both horse and human) to discover the level of communication and understanding. In this process of observation I was again drawn to the importance and purpose of this series of articles...***Develop a set of lesson plans to accomplish together as horse and rider that lead the team to a higher level of understanding, partnership, and unity.*** It so critical that we recognize the tremendous responsibility we have to provide leadership, with clarity and consistency, in order to achieve this ultimate goal of brilliant communication.

This month, as you add even more exercises to your 3-5 Day Lesson Plan, I'd like you think about four important areas or qualities that prepare us and the horse to develop this effortless communication. I see them as four questions I ask myself before, during, and after the ride to help me determine if I am on the right path to providing leadership:

Mental Preparation: Is my mind in the right place, in the present moment, and ready to interact with my horse? Have I clearly decided what today's exercises will be, and know why I am accomplishing them, how to set them up, and what I will reward as successful movement and behavior? (Note: In this question I have a challenge for each of you...Begin to develop your library of printed and video information. Start studying the master horsemen of old and some aspiring horsemen of present. Become a scholar of horsemanship! You will find a suggested reading list in the T&T Horsemanship Workbook, and a partial list at the end of this article.) Finally, is my horse mentally prepared, and am I ready to watch his eyes and ears to recognize that I have him mentally *with* me?

Physical Preparation: Have I prepared my core area – stomach, back, ribcage – to develop a “positive tension” that enables me to flow with my horse's movement, without being stiff? On the opposite side, watching that in my desire to be supple that I don't become a noodle! Am I flexible in the neck, shoulders, torso, hip, knee, and ankles and have I warmed all those body parts up? Have I checked my horse out physically by watching him move at liberty, by doing some basic and focused ground work, and with supple maneuvers on board?

Emotional Fitness: What is going on in my mind, in my body, in my life that will affect my attitude during this training session? How will I approach today's lesson...With a smile on my face and ready to reward the slightest try, or as a demanding drill sergeant? Have I asked my horse where his emotions are today? So often behaviors that seem to be related to the horse's emotions and attitude, have their root in the physical well-being. I know if my back is hurting it is hard for me to approach my work and schooling in a happy receptive manner.

Spiritual Health: This is a hard quality to discuss, because we lack the words to describe adequately the feeling I am trying to portray. I am not talking about spirituality in religious definitions. It is this deep personal connection, fostered by understanding and appreciation of the greater environment surrounding you, which allows you to be open to feeling *of*, *for*, and *with* your horse. This is where I believe the horse is our best teacher, in that he was never *disconnected* from his surroundings, so he acts, reacts, and interacts in a completely honest format. In our very busy world it is incredibly important that we slow down and connect daily with our personal spiritual health. So what's the question I ask myself to determine my spiritual preparedness...Have I taken a deep breath, become present and aware, and taken a moment to reflect on how incredibly lucky I am to have the horse in my life?

As you apply the lesson plans for this month, and combine them with previous suggestions, I hope you will begin each session by asking yourself the overarching question: Am I mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually prepared to be a good leader for my horse? Personally my answer is always...Not Quite! But as an “Aspiring Horseman” I will keep trying my very best, and thank God for the patience, forgiveness, and grace the horse gives to me everyday!

Day One - Straight

Ground School: Liberty work using surcingle, with light side rein contact, or reins drawn up thru the gullet of the western saddle & hooked around the horn, so that a light contact is made on the snaffle bit

Riding:After your ground school and supple exercises on board:Begin to review your rating exercises, on both straight lines and circles, but now ask for a little more connection of the hind quarters driving forward, as the poll lifts, and the reins/hands have a very light contact with the mouth. The outside rein should be supportive, feeling for the tongue and requesting a longitudinal arch in the horse, and the inside rein should be active, also feeling for the tongue but releasing that feel when a slight lateral arch is achieved. You are striving for the beginnings of collection & engagement, with rhythm, balance, and straightness. Think of developing “carriage”, rather than a “frame”

Day Two - Lateral

Ground School: Review the steps of Work in Hand from last month, and add:

* Shoulder-In on a square
* Haunches-In from the track, to the diagonal (Half Pass)

Riding:
After supple exercises while riding:
Begin a series of requests that combine the lateral maneuvers you have been practicing. Take particular care in thinking of and seeing the pattern in your minds-eye before each transition. (Riding will become increasingly geometric!)
Example: Start down the outside track traveling left; At the far corner of the longside, pick up a shoulder-in, and carry for 5 steps, then straighten; At the next long side corner, pick up a haunches-in, and carry for 5 steps; Now begin alternating 5 steps shoulder-in, straighten, 5 steps haunches-in & straighten; Next come down the quarter-line, and leg-yield on the diagonal to the wall. The possibilities are endless!

Day Three Cowboy

Ground School: Send your horse forward on a circle; Change the positioning of your energy to develop a Turn-on-Center, where you are leading the outside front foot of the horse on a forward arch, and your energy is flowing on an arch past his tail; The outside front foot reaches on the arch of a small circle, while his inside hind foot reaches under his body, in balance

Riding:
(Don't forget to practice last month's drills and supple exercises!)
Accomplish the same pattern/maneuver on board as you did in your ground school (i.e. Balanced Turn-on-Center) The key is to keep all four quarters of the horse moving and reaching equally. Often times, as you make the circle smaller and smaller, the outside front foot declines to reach forward on that smaller arch. Keep the forward momentum with a little bump of your *outside* leg. When it feels smooth as glass, reward by softly riding out of the circle.

Day Four Dressage

Ground School: Your warm-up for ground school will first be warming up YOUR mind and body! Start on your two-leg horse, and ride the patterns you have been practicing work in hand. Pay particular attention to where your weight and balance needs to be to accomplish a leg yield posture, such as shoulder-in, as opposed to a half pass posture, such as a haunches-in.

Riding: After warm-up of utilizing previous straight and lateral day movements – Combine the training level tests from the past two articles, with some of the lateral movements, and write your own test! Take advantage of the long sides to throw in steps of shoulder-in, and when you find yourself on a quarter or center-line try a few steps of half pass. I highly recommend getting finding the book of USEF Dressage Tests, maybe even join the organization!

www.usef.org

www.oregondressage.com

Partial List of Resources: (To further help you develop your lesson plans)

Gymnastic Exercises for Horses – Vol. 1 & 2 by Eleanor Russell
The Handbook of Riding Essentials – by Francois Lemaire de Ruffieu
The Complete Training Horse and Rider – by Alois Podhajsky
Dressage – by Henry Wynmalen
Kinship with All Life – by J. Allen Boone
True Unity by Tom Dorrance, Edited by Milly Hunt Porter

Day Five – Doma Vaquera
Doma Vaquera Basico Test

A to B to D is the “Centerline”
Note: School letters in Doma Vaquera are different than dressage

A B C-D-E-F-G	Enter canter Halt at C (Judge Sits at D) Proceed working trot, Track right
G-B At C C-D-L	Track right, ¼ turn just shy of centerline Ride Figure 8, 1 st circle right – 2 nd circle to left Proceed track left, working trot
3 At L- E-K-to Centerline	Begin serpentine
4 At Centerline	Halt and backup 4 steps facing E-F
5 Centerline to F-G-B	Proceed at walk, track right
6 Between B & C	Figure 8, 1 st circle left – 2 nd right
7 Proceed C-D-F	Medium walk, track right
8 At F	Canter
9 F-H-A-I to J At J	Proceed working canter 10 meter circle right lead
10 Proceed J-K-L	Working canter right lead
11 At L Proceed L-D-E	Walk Working walk
12 At E	Begin serpentine to right
13 At J	10 meter circle left lead
Proceed J-I-A-B-C At C	Working Canter Halt and backup 6 steps

