

# Bridle Up with Dennis Auslam



## Benefits of Dressage Movement in a Western Horse

As Western riders many of us, over the years, have had a tendency to force our horses to side-pass, get in the bridle, two track, turn on the forehand, turn on the hind-quarters, etc., too quickly. We tend to rush those movements and that, in the long run, disrupts the relationship between the rider and the horse. More and more trainers are realizing this. Many of today's top trainers have been using a certain amount of dressage movements on their horses for year, though not calling it that.

The longer I train the more I understand that horses are no different than we are. If we were going to run a 26 mile marathon we wouldn't go out and train for it in 15 days, or 20, or even 30 days. But we seem to have a mindset that we can go out to work with our horses and in one evening of training the horse should learn to side-pass or two-track and do it perfectly. That said, I am also going to say this: there is no such thing as a fully trained horse after 20 days of training. That is a fallacy in this industry and is one of the reasons people get hurt.

In all actuality each one of the maneuvers mentioned takes a different muscle group in the horse's body to accomplish it correctly. 9 times out of 10 we haven't spent enough time building on those individual muscle groups and working at breaking down the individual body parts of the horse. We neglect to work the hindquarters, the ribs, the shoulders, the neck, and the head and we have a tendency to rush all of that. What then happens is the horse gets frustrated, we get frustrated and before long the horse learns to hate all these maneuvers and most likely starts to act up.

You can work your horse on the ground and teach him to disengage his hindquarter, his rib cage, move his shoulder, etc., and do it efficiently. However, when we are sitting on him we are sitting on the weakest part of the horse – the back – and we are in their way. What we have to do is build the muscles, the whole package, on an individual basis and attain their natural balance with you on them before we start asking for all of the fancy movements.

Dressage training makes the horse use every part of his body fluidly, effortlessly and cooperatively. It does this by building up the horse one step at a time. With dressage we are taking the time by building the individual muscle groups and learning to understand the mechanics of the horse. One of the biggest problems today is that most people don't understand the mechanics of the horse. We have to come to the understanding that "WE" have to get the proper education to attain a ready, willing and able horse while building and maintaining a great relationship with the horse. Please notice that emphasis is on "WE" and not on the horse. It is our education that will make all the difference in the world.

Even I, as a professional trainer, am always learning and still take lessons. I am always trying to further my education. Over the last few years I have studied with JP Giacomini, Mari Monda Zdunic and others. Even going and listening to qualified trainers will give you a tremendous amount of information that you will find beneficial, but there is nothing as valuable as hands on training.

I had a young lady call me last fall that was a high level dressage rider. She wanted to study with me for Western Riding and I jumped at the opportunity. Though I may be able to teach her some Western Riding, all of us here at Redwood Stables were excited to watch her ride and learn from her as well.

The benefits of teaching dressage movements to your horse, whether you are a trail rider, team roper, cutter, and so forth is that it is going to make for a much more balanced and cooperative horse. The reason for this is because we have taken the time to build the proper muscle groups in the proper order. When we do that every move becomes effortless for the horse, plus each step is perfected before the next step is undertaken.

You will become so in-tune with your horse that just the slightest thought in your head kicks in a certain amount of muscle memory in you which then transfers directly to the horse. At that point you will have everyone around you wondering how you are making the horse do that. You will be able to get your horse to do things the average rider won't be able to do. This was exactly how the old Vaqueros and the Spanish used to do it and it was a 7 year process to get your horse in the full bridle – not 30 or 60 days.

If you will put yourself in your horse's shoes and think about how you would like to be taught you will gain a whole different perspective of training and if you implement that you will actually end up with a sane horse, as long as you started out with one. Midwest Western Dressage is having Western Dressage clinics on a regular basis. This may be something you should check out. You can find them online at [www.midwestwesterndressage.com](http://www.midwestwesterndressage.com).

About Dennis Auslam: Dennis has been a trainer for over 30 years, working with many different breeds and disciplines. He grew up with horses and has worked with some of the best trainers in the industry. His passion is horses and people and he loves helping people learn how to work with their horses, progress in their riding abilities and make that connection with their horse. You will find Dennis at various horse related events in 2012. He also does numerous clinics and demos, both at his stable Redwood Stables in Morton, MN and at other venues. His main focus is on confidence building for the horse and the rider.

For information regarding his clinics and demonstrations please visit his website at [www.redwoodstables.com](http://www.redwoodstables.com). Interested in hosting a clinic? Call (507) 525-6691 or email us at [redwoodstables@mvtvwireless.com](mailto:redwoodstables@mvtvwireless.com).

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