



# FEEL, TIMING AND BALANCE

## Part 1: FEEL

When I was asked to write about feel, timing and balance it is bit like being asked to write about the search for the Holy Grail or the meaning of life. All three qualities are very ambiguous in nature and will mean many things to riders of all ages depending on experience levels. These qualities are very important to the horse and the rider will need to develop these qualities within their riding and work with their friend the horse. Feel, Timing and Balance are difficult qualities to teach. Through awareness and experience, over time you will have a better quality of feel to offer your horse.

Bill Dorrance has a book called: " True Horsemanship Through Feel ", it is a very apt title. To develop a horse through feel may at times feel more time consuming for the rider. For some horses that have a strong sense of self-preservation it maybe the only way that you will be able to develop their education.

To begin with the first step for the rider is awareness, and then it is to develop that awareness. The horse is probably our best teacher throughout and some horses will cause you to develop your feel, timing and balance out of necessity. A rider can walk into a yard or enclosure to catch their horse and will cause the whole herd to stampede without ever being aware of how their



body demeanor caused this to occur. The rider was not feeling of the horse's sensitivity and or flight zone. Feel is not just doing, it is doing with feeling and awareness.

For most riders when first starting out, feel will be much more of a physical and mechanical approach. When a horse is loose and you are going to catch the horse to



halter, the feel will be more indirect or mental.

To enable that feel to develop between the horse and yourself you will often need to start with the physical and over time as this develops the feel will become much more subtle and refined that it is more mental and less physical.

There are many ways that you can get a horse to feel back to you. When you have a halter and lead you will be asking the horse to follow the feel of that halter which is much more direct and physical. We would really like to see the horse operate with feel right throughout their body.

It would be irrelevant if a halter was on the horse's head, or the reins on our snaffle, or getting the horse to move away from the feel of our leg or backing our horse up by the tail, it is all the same. It is about feel.

When we are first starting out the horse may oppose the feel that we are offering on the halter lead that is natural. We may also have to change our presentation of what we are offering so that the horse can better understand.

As the horse better understands what we are asking the horse will start to soften and relax and let down.

When the horse is tight and tense the feel offered will be the same. As an example when we are asking with the halter or snaffle bit for the horse to bend his head it is not just a matter of getting that horse to physically bend their head around it also about feeling his muscles through his ribcage and back relax and where how the horse is balanced

I am unable to remember who to attribute the quote below, it has a lot of relevance and I quote:

"It's simple, but incredibly difficult! You must turn loose inside of yourself, before you can let go of your horse! You will never know what your horse is feeling or thinking, until you can feel what they are thinking! "

When riding a horse that is unresponsive the feel that this horse has will often be dull and lifeless. Equally it is important that the horse is in class or school. I cannot direct the horses attention if I do not have it. With a horse that is this way I will often try and get the horse moving forward more and their feet freed up. As the horse begins to move forward more and the feet get a flow and rhythm to the movement the horse will have a better feel through the reins and be more responsive to my body and legs.

In trying to put thoughts into words, the reality is that many words could be used and I still would be unable to convey the message. Listen to what your horse says and the feel and feedback that they give.

I appreciate that there may be many that are looking for specific exercises of how to do this. This article is not meant to be a how to article but one that causes us all to think. I wish all well in their horsemanship.