

Common Sense and Horsemanship

By Dr. Mike Guerini

As I was growing up the Western movies were becoming rare genres. The classics and some of the newer horse movies were fun to watch especially when the horseman rode his trusty horse over hills, through herds of cattle and even down the side of a cliff. At night I would lay my head down and think of those rides and wish for a day when I could ride my horse just like the rider in the movie. My mother asked me what I found so thrilling about the idea of riding my horse down the side of a cliff. I smiled at her and said---because then I would be a great rider.

Thankfully, for my horses' sake, I never made that ride...instead I chose to follow the path of learning how to be a great horseman.

As I work with many horses and learn from some of the great horsemen and horsewomen I realize that good horsemanship and common sense go together. Common sense is doing what is prudent and using good judgment. Why when we hear someone describe how and where he or she rode a horse this past weekend do we cringe? As the rider is describing his ride we never envision the great western rides in the movies...we envision wrecks, injuries or at the very least a scrape or two. We often walk away wondering if this rider has any common sense!

All too often people use the image of riding a horse in a movie as the goal of their training program. People forget that the horse in the movie has been trained and worked with consistently in order to achieve the result we see on the big screen.

Unfortunately common sense seems to be missing from many riders. Great riders can sit on a horse and navigate obstacles. Great riders have excellent balance and good hand and eye coordination. Great riders feel free and unworried as they ride. Great riders do not always use common sense when riding. Great horseman can do everything that a great rider can do AND they use common sense. They first teach the horse how to work off of leg pressure and respond to a cue. Great horseman listen to the horse's body language and then adapt the training program so that they are as compassionate as possible yet remain in control and offer consistent instruction to the horse.

Many people who ride want to make a connection with the horse; they want to build a relationship. Thank goodness we have many excellent horsemen and women who demonstrate techniques and methods for helping us build this relationship. Sadly though these learned horsemen and horsewomen cannot teach us common sense.

How do we incorporate common sense into our riding and training programs? First we need to stop and decide what realistic goals we want to achieve. Then we need to develop an approach that relies on safety, knowledge and good judgment. Take the time to make informed decisions, take the time to learn how to ride correctly, take the time to learn about the horse you ride. As a horse owner we all get to decide if we want to be a great rider or a great horseman. I hope we can take the time to become great horsemen and horsewomen.

Dr. Mike Guerini is a clinician in Nebraska and you can learn more about Dr. Mike and his 6 C's of Horsemanship at www.dunmovinranch.com.