

Vaquero Renaissance

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By Tiffany Deering

It is rumored that we are now in a "Horsemanship Renaissance". For one reason or another, it seems that in less than a century of the horse losing his pivotal place in our society, people in general lost their ability to train and ride horses. It is amazing to consider that in a similar amount of time, societies such as the Native Americans and Mexicans became accomplished horsemen with such skill and without the formal education available to their European counterparts.

The natives of North America adapted very unique styles of riding to suit their purposes. The Spanish conquistadors undoubtedly initiated the livelihood of the vaquero as they colonized Mexico and introduced horses, tack and cattle to the region, but the native herdsmen deserve the credit for refining their horsemanship style and gear. They did not attend anything like the Vienna Riding Academy, nor were they schooled in the teachings of Xenophon. Rather, their skill was developed by their own experience and dedication, with hours day in and day out spent on horseback working cattle. American Indian tribes learned how to ride the wild mustangs without the benefit of bit or saddle or recruitment of the Dons, and on top of that were capable of shooting arrows and fighting in battles horseback. Amazingly, these skills were developed within just a few generations within societies that had never even seen horses before, some thinking they were large dogs the first time they beheld them.

My point in all this is that there is no excuse for riders today to not be as adept at equitation as the horsemen of the past. For millennia the bond between man, be he warrior, soldier, vaquero, or cowboy, and the horse was remarkable, their very lives depending on their relationship and their ability to ride. Nowadays, most horse riders today are nervous to even trot and canter. Perhaps it is the lack of a purpose that has led to such a large number of rider's stagnant in their horsemanship.

But take heart! Consider that these uneducated, poorly resourced peoples became such impressive and talented riders on their own merit, just by spending time with their horses. In the 1800's, these men could only rely on oral tradition, a few mentors they were fortunate enough to learn from, and their own experience. Today, all it takes is a little effort to gain the same knowledge and wisdom. With the availability of all these modern resources, a person today should be able to ride with confidence and ever-increasing skill in a reasonably short amount of time. Keep in mind, while the riding academies, instructional clinics, tack supply stores and multitudes of educational material on the subject all have their place, it is not necessary to have any of these things to become a skilled horseman.

Which leads us back to the idea of the "Horsemanship Renaissance." It is refreshing to know that so many people are seeking out the knowledge and wisdom out there. Through teachers, books, visual media, and web sites such as this, a person can improve their riding skills and relationship with their horse dramatically and quickly. There's a lot of "tradition" out there, but just because it's traditional doesn't mean it's right. Also, don't let pride hinder you from pursuing such enlightenment. Rekindle the purpose behind your riding, remembering that your best mentor will always be your horse.

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It is unfortunate that there are not many human mentors preserving the Vaquero tradition today, but if you seek, you will find them. Craftsmen capable of producing the tools used and teachers of such are harder to come by, and hopefully this situation will improve in the future. The purpose of this site is to assist you in this quest, so that perhaps you will be the mentor to the next generation of Vaqueritos. Horsemanship Renaissance or no, there is no doubt that there are those preserving and living the lifestyle, and we are proud to be a part of it.

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