



Time & Horses

By Tim Hayes

Someone once said that God invented time to keep everything from happening at once. In fact humans invented time to bring order, meaning and understanding to their unique existence.

As far as we know humans are the only animals with recognized self-awareness, rational thinking and therefore a mental concept of time. Other animals may be aware of the physical changes in day and night, summer and winter and thus able to respond to these changes, but it is only humans that will ever know if they are "late". A horse for that matter never thinks: "oh my, I'm running out of time." Understanding and remembering this significant difference will have an enormous impact on how you and your horse get along and the success you will achieve in your horsemanship and riding.

Today more than ever humans live by the clock. We fit every minute of our lives into a schedule. We create predetermined requirements as to how much time it will take to achieve satisfaction in everything we do. However when something we want to happen within a certain amount of time doesn't, it usually leads to stress, tension, anger, frustration and disappointment.

Being "late" is an excellent example of the importance of time and the difference it can make to both horse and human.

If I ride on Wednesdays at 4 pm and don't arrive at the barn until 3:55 pm, I may rush to groom and tack up my horse in order to get as much riding time as possible. Knowing that I am "late" I believe I'm using up valuable riding time while getting my horse ready to ride. This thought makes me anxious and tense.

Instead of presenting myself to my horse as a happy, calm, relaxed friend and leader, I show him a partner who is

anxious, frustrated, preoccupied, and tense. The quality of my grooming and saddling, which is usually a nice way to connect with my horse, is now a signal to him that something is not right with his human partner.

As we start to ride I feel a resistance coming from my horse. He's telling me with his body (the only way he knows how): "I'm not feeling safe or comfortable with you on my back right now, can you do something to help me?" I think: "Oh that's great."

Not only am I going to run out of riding time, but I'm going to have to struggle with my horse and his bad attitude." I do what most people do; I blame the horse.

I begin to feel angry and frustrated and my cues become rough and heavy-handed. This is frightening for my horse. He thinks: "not only is my partner in a bad mood; he's hurting me!" At this point my horse will usually do one of two things. He'll mentally shut down, brace himself and tolerate me until the ride is over - this is how humans create dullness in their horses.

Or he'll ask me to leave (read: buck me off) - this is how humans get hurt.

Natural Horsemanship is seeing and understanding every situation from the horse's point of view. It took me years and many mistakes to remember this and therefore the enormous impact that time (or more accurately the non-existence of time) has on my horse and my horsemanship.

Now when I get to the barn and I'm "late," I simply change my agenda. Instead of trying to fit 20 minutes of groundwork and 40 minutes of riding into 50 minutes, I'll relax, change my plans, just do groundwork or take a leisurely free-style ride with the time I have left.

By putting myself on "horse time" I show understanding



"Horse Time in Idaho" Photo by Tim Hayes, 1995

and respect for my partner. Then no matter what we do the time we share has real quality: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Instead of ending up frustrated, disappointed or hurt, we not only have fun, we both have a "great time."

*Love is what we give our time to.
Children know this - so do horses.*

To find out about Clinics, Group Classes or Private Sessions call Tim at: 631-329-5840, or visit:

www.hayesisforhorses.com