

## David O'Connor

Feb., 2012

*David O'Connor won Individual Olympic Gold at the Sydney Olympics in Eventing. He and his wife Karen O'Connor are long time members of the USET. David O'Connor is a USPC alumni, past coach of the Canadian Olympic Event team and Pan Am Gold Medal winning team, and is the current coach of the US Olympic Event team.*

### In hand work:

First learned in-hand work from Gene Lewis – he trained cavalry horses; was later the top H/J trained on the West Coast along with Jimmy Williams because he was such an excellent horseman

At their farm they have a Hitchcock pen:

- 20X70 m
- Round ends with a long side
- Put fences in there for free jumping
- Do a lot of long-lining

He learned the Classical system from Jack LeGoff

The Western (natural horsemanship) side adds another dimension

- Its' about communication with the horse
- This communication is about the way a horse can understand

Jumping on the line:

- If you learn the 8-9 things it takes to jump a horse on a line it will change the way you look at a horse all 'round.

Natural Horsemanship is not a magic system

- Don't get caught up with people who tell you this halter type/'wand'/round pen will be the magic cure-all
  - o Those things are just tools
  - o It's all about how/when you use those tools

First theory:

Pressure

- How do we communicate
  - o Pressure on/pressure off
- Anything in front of the shoulder is for
  - o Sideways
  - o Backward
- Anything behind the shoulder is for
  - o Sideways
  - o Forward

The first thing a horse should learn is to yield to pressure

- 1<sup>st</sup>: move from touch
- Then: move from movement (swing the lead shank, etc.)

You need to get the horse looking to you; the horse needs to say 'What?'

- Use cat claws on nose and neck

Teach people how to swing a rope

- Touch toe/don't touch toe (with rope)

Does not own a chain shank

- That's only about 'No'

Has a rope halter

1. You need to teach a horse 4 things:
  - Hind end yield
  - Front end yield
  - Head down
    - o When you teach this, the horse can't see you; therefore he trusts you
  - Back up
    - o Use muscle squeeze
    - o Use rope waggle
      - Look for lip licking – this shows understanding

Back up to invite a horse into your space

- Release pressure, invite them into your world

'Join up' (Monty Roberts' phrase)

- DOC prefers 'Look' – you want the horse to look to you, look at the jump, look for what to do next
2. Circle on the line (longeing, but he uses long lead shank)

- a. Make sure the horse goes on a circle; you stand still
  - b. To turn, use hind end yield; get the horse to turn in and 'look'
  - c. When it works is when you know when to go to neutral; have the ability to soften
  - d. Longeing now is for development of the back muscles
    - i. Previously, people taught longeing to teach riders
3. Longe horse over a pole
  4. Progress to a small jump
  5. Longe over a slightly larger jump – make sure to pick up line over standard
  6. Progress to larger jumps
  7. Goal: to get everyone to jump over poles
    - a. Who has the anxiety?
      - i. The rider
      - ii. Show them the horse can do it
      - iii. Changes the idea of leg and how much to use

If a horse wants to play, give her a game

Bolting: the horse pushes the shoulder in

- If you back off – they have you
- Why do horses run off?
  - o 1<sup>st</sup> time: something bothers them
  - o Subsequent times: because they've learned they can

Leadership/authority and personality

- Set it up so they choose
- If a horse gets loose/won't be caught:
  - o When it goes away, use the whip (chase)
  - o When it turns toward you – turn away from it

The horse is a herd animal; but we people put them by themselves in stalls/paddocks

You have to become their herd

Bucket horse:

- If you take a bunch of horses in a field, and put a bucket of grain there
  - o One horse will get the bucket/grain – he's the bucket horse
  - o A couple horses will circle around, complaining – they're the whiners
  - o Some will stand off to the side, waiting, and go after so see if anything is left – they're the waiters
    - Who are you?
    - Which one is your horse?

- A good match is when you and your horse are the same type

DOC uses his horses as lesson horses

- You cannot screw them up because they know what the game is; they understand

Horses must be trained to hunter standards

- Not all horses need to go in snaffles
- However, most horses are over-bitted

Parelli/Natural horsemanship is about conditioning

- in eventing, horses learn to solve problems
  - they understand it, they don't just do it

When a horse turns his shoulders (on the line, etc.) that's a huge deal

When you stand still and he moves – that's a huge deal

Everything is a round pen: stall, paddocks, etc.

## Riding Lesson– Novice group

The horse needs to have 4 different trots and 3 different canters

- You need to be able to pull them out of the bag when needed

When stuck in a stall as a show, it's better to ride a few times a day than one big ride once a day

- If a horse schools well at home then freaks out at a show: use the above strategy
- Communicate the same way
- *If they get dingy, give them more to do*
- DOC does not like saying 'No' except when:
  - Going fast – that crosses the line

EXERCISE:

- On the 20 m circle, keep the horse straight
  - Most people bend too much for a circle of this size
  - Ride through the cones
  - Go to medium trot, don't lose haunches
  - When posting, post taller for more expressive trot
  - Medium trot

- 2 point
- Collect
- Canter – put hands on neck
- Lengthen
- Collect
- Sit
- Trot
- Change rein, canter
  - When using a bridge, thumbs touching
- Trot
- Do a figure 8 with a small fence in the middle
  - Don't look straight ahead, look at the curve

Dressage horse (was over-jumping)

- needs to learn to jump out; use a different aid for this horse; post higher);
- teach it to gallop
- use a wide ground line to open the arc
  - this is short term

EXERCISE: 2 canter poles to a small jump

- Trot fence
- Canter fence

EXERCISE: OXER

- Canter the oxer
- Bend slightly to outside – this controls the leg (for the horse that is hoppy)
- If the horse is going forward too much, step in stirrup
- Hands are powerful communicators
  - Don't saw – this tells the horse nothing
  - Keep your hands in the same spot
  - Release the horse when it drops its head
  - If they resist, you resist
  - Bad eventing habit
    - Don't land and drop hands
    - Keep hands off the neck

Gene Lewis: 80% of problems – caused by being too slow or too fast

Keep working on canter/trot transitions

EXERCISE: Bending line

- Make a choice - the horse will follow your answer
- If you don't make a choice, the horse becomes a dingbat
  - o *Give the horse the answer*
  - o Don't wing it – that's no structure – *the horse wants structure*
- Always be thinking 6 strides in front of you

#### EXERCISE: COURSE

- **Can't make changes in the last 2 strides**
- Get the horse to go enjoy jumping
  - o Work on style later
- The perfect horse will:
  - o Hit a good spot 33%, a long spot 33%, a short spot 33%
  - o When he comes in short, don't slow down
    - Slow is not the same as collect/shorten/compress
- Direct them:
  - o 'What do I want?' rather than reacting to them
- Position:
  - o Follow horse – *be neutral*; its different for each gait
    - Watch a horse longed from above, notice how the back of the saddle moves
  - o If the rider moves, the horse needs to make a change
    - If you don't mean it, you're not neutral
    - If I'm in neutral, the horse remains the same
- In eventing, people use too much leg
  - o This teaches horse to ignore the power of neutral

#### EXERCISE: Bounce rails on landing

- Confidence,
- Shape
- Good exercise for water, etc.
  - o When jumping a bending line, pick where you are going to land
  - o Every show jumping course has gaps
    - Very important to *use the gap to get the canter back and prepare* for the next exercise
    - *A course is not 15 fences*
      - **Divide it into 3-4 different sections**, divided by gaps (preparation places)
        - o *A gap is 25 strides*

Before riding your first fence in a course (stadium) – test: forward, back

4 things to do before the salute:

- Lengthen, shorten, halt, rein back
- Consistently do those 4 things and you will consistently have the tools to do the exercises.