

Week-long clinic report by Stephanie Roundy California

The first time I rode with Mark Rashid, my goal was to ride my horse without a major argument. It may sound simple, but I could not even get my horse to walk a circle in the arena without a tantrum. Mark taught me a new way to think about interacting with my horse, and we had accomplished my goal by the end of the first day. For the rest of the clinic, I began to learn the concept of softness. Prior to that clinic, I had contemplated selling my horse because I just could not get along with her. Since the clinic a year and a half ago (2004), she and I have continued to progress and communicate better everyday. The things Mark taught me stuck with me long after I got home from the clinic. I couldn't wait to ride with him again.

The second time I rode with Mark, I brought a different horse, and I told him I wanted to learn something new. I told him I would like to learn some cues and techniques so I could do some refining on this horse. He taught me to try *thinking* what I wanted first, and then apply a cue if I needed. I found that I could accomplish many things by just thinking it and never applying a physical cue that I was aware of. I could get either canter lead, I could get a bend in my horse, and I could change the length of her trot, all on a loose rein and all by what seemed to be thought alone. Needless to say, this opened a whole new horizon in my horsemanship. I came home with a whole new perspective. I tried this with my other riding horses. I found that I got along better, and accomplished more with all of them simply by thinking what I wanted before asking for it with a physical cue.

The next opportunity I had to ride with Mark was a week long clinic, and I was able to bring two horses. This format is different than the other clinics I had attended. We met at the beginning of each day and discussed what our goals and plans were for the day. We rode all day, and I switched horses after lunch. At the end of the day, the group met again and discussed what we learned that day. The format was extremely conducive to learning. By riding all day, it gave me time to contemplate and practice the ideas we had discussed each morning and afternoon. If I needed help, it was always available. If I just wanted to practice and try things, I had plenty of time to play with my horse. One of the horses I brought was a thoroughbred mare that I have had for a few years, but I could never get along with. She had begun to rear and balk every time I rode her. My goal for the clinic was to just be able to ride her without rearing, balking or otherwise arguing. By the end of the clinic, we were cantering all over without a rear or balk in sight. Again, Mark taught me a different way to think about

interacting with my horse. He was able to help us communicate without arguing or fighting. In the five months that we have been home, we have continued to make amazing progress based on the changes Mark taught us. We have found softness from the inside and been able to carry it forward. The horse I hated to ride is now my favorite horse to ride. The other horse I brought is a mare that has had a lot of anxiety for as long as I have known her. While she would like to be cooperative, she had difficulty accomplishing any task without a high level of anxiety. Mark worked with us to help us find another way of going. He helped me work with her until her anxiety just melted away. Since we have come home from the clinic, she continues to be calm and happy inside. I know I could never have done it without Mark's help, but I think I could do it again now that I know how, and that is the sign of a true teacher.

I feel like the things I have learned from riding with Mark are the foundation of good horsemanship. He has taught me how to think, feel and be with horses, and it has made tremendous changes in the way I interact with my horses. It has brought me to be a more present, patient and honest person. I am never sure what I am going to learn when I ride with Mark, but I know that it will be something that will stick with me and that I will continue to practice long after the clinic.