

Get Out of t

By Tina Watki

The new year is here along with a desire for fresh starts and 'thinking outside the box'.

After hearing this sentiment from several people I was inspired to write about getting out of our individual sand rings and integrating the benefits of our sport's different disciplines.

I believe incorporating some of the most positive aspects of the various disciplines will make our horses the best they can possibly be. In this article we will discuss how to add them into a riding program.

Endurance riding builds strength but the diverse footing conditions also bring benefits. Too many of us just ride on one type of footing all the time, but introducing variety could help build tissue. With regular challenge the body strengthens and adapts and with this added capacity we could reduce the chance of injury.



Dressage is known for its precision. From these riders we can learn to look much more deeply at our horse's posture, and strive to create a more perfect balance.

Jumping brings us elevation and random patterns. Horses are asked to navigate poles and

cavalettis, and there is nothing that strengthens like it. We can also learn from the jumpers to vary our program and execute different patterns at pace, keeping things fresh for horse and rider.

In hand work, for example lunging or driving, shows us a horse does not need to be held in a shape by

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the rider's hands. A true form can be achieved by showing the horse how to find collection within its own body. This independent postural shape will create muscle memory that will help you in your ride.

Race horses can teach us about speed and endurance. We can learn how to evaluate our horse's level of endurance versus what's required for our specific sport. Most of us never consider this, and often compete without the endurance we need for our specific sports.

Hunter horses teach us how to find rhythm and pace. Once a horse has a sufficient level of fitness it can use its muscles very economically and save energy for harder exertion.

Reining horses show us isometric contraction in the sliding stops. This sustained contraction is fantastic for creating core strength. The better the core strength, the better your horse is overall.

Eventing horses can educate us on the finer points of fitness. How to assess our horse's respiration and equate that to overall body fitness. Total fitness is often overlooked by riders, but it is money in the March/April 2017

bank when it comes to competing with a horse who is properly strengthened to withstand the forces and torque within their individual discipline.

Breed competitors show us to pay attention to gait quality. Evaluating if we truly have our horses moving as well as they could is integral to training in all disciplines.


Cutting horses can teach us all that a horse needs to be 'on your aids'. This means that when the rider asks for a movement, the communication is so fine-tuned the result is instant.

Some of these disciplines may be the polar opposite to how you ride. But there is a reason that all forms of riding were developed and there is a beauty in every one of them.

A horse rider combination

that is in harmony is magical to watch no matter what saddle style adorns these amazing creatures.

I invite you to analyze your ride and training techniques.

Are you getting stuck in your own sand ring, or are you encompassing all aspects of great horsemanship? 

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