

## “What Horsemanship Means to Me”

“A horse doesn’t care how much you know, until he knows how much you care.” (Pat Parelli). The foundation of horsemanship comes down to the relationship you have between you and your horse. It’s the passion and knowledge behind horsemanship that builds that bond. What does horsemanship mean to me? It means so many things...

Horsemanship means **hard work**. Riding horses, training horses and knowing horses is hard work. It is important to recognize that each day is going to provide you with a new opportunities both on the ground and mounted. It’s giving the horse the ability to try, and to try again when mistakes are made. It’s the hard work, sweat, and tears put in by both horse and rider.

Horsemanship means **owning up** to your mistakes. It’s being humble enough to recognize when you’ve made a mistake and then trying to fix it. Riding horses takes hard work and mistakes are what make you grow as a rider. If you are able to accept your mistakes and own them as a learning opportunity, you have good horsemanship.

Horsemanship means **recognizing** where you need to improve your skills. Each horse you ride will give you opportunities to improve your skills. Even the same horse you’ve been riding for years will help you improve your skills as you learn new things together. Improving your skills as a rider will increase your horsemanship and knowledge. It will not only benefit you but it will improve the horses you are riding.

Horsemanship means **sweat**. It’s the sweat you put into every ride, every experience, and every opportunity around horses. It’s the sweat you produce when you’re setting up standards and poles early in the morning, when you’re picking pens in the afternoon, and when you’re cleaning out stalls at the end of the day. It’s the sweat you produce when you try over and over again to get your horse to side pass perfectly, when you jump the same line time and time again to get two strides instead of three, and it’s the sweat you produce when you are pushing to get the best time in your jumper round. It’s also the sweat you produce sitting in the afternoon sun on a summer day watching your horse graze in the field because the Alberta heat is too much to bare.

Horsemanship means **emotions**. Riding, training and learning horses is a roller-coaster of emotions. One day you will feel on top of the world, and the next you will feel like you have no idea what you are doing. It’s the weeks of amazing rides, amazing moments with your horse, and those rides that just click, to the weeks of frustration, annoyance, and anger when things are not going right. It’s the proud moment you feel when both you and your horse succeed, and the discouragement when you feel like you just cannot get it. It’s the nerves before the big horse show, the anxiety as you enter the ring, and the thrill of the jump as you soar over. It’s the disappointment when you don’t come in first, but the happiness when your best friend does. Recognising and knowing that riding will allow you to experience all these emotions, and how you deal with them is horsemanship.

Horsemanship means **mindfulness**. Horses are big, strong and powerful animals. As a rider you need to be mindful of your surroundings. Being careful and taking the necessary safety

precautions, and teaching them to those who are not as knowledgeable. It's also important to be mindful when you are riding. Taking the opportunity to be in the moment and to feel connected to your horse. For some, riding is the most mindful activity as they are letting go of every stress, worry and thought and focusing solely on the horse they are riding and the experience they are having in that moment.

Horsemanship means **attitude**. Having the right attitude as an equestrian says a lot about your horsemanship. Riders need to encourage each other, help each other and cheer each other on. Your positive attitude as a rider allows you to gain experience, knowledge and builds the bonds with other riders and your horse.

Horsemanship means **new experiences**. Your first time jumping, your first time going on a trail ride, and your first time going to a horse show. It's the first time you ride a green horse, the first time you gallop through an open field, and the first time you sore over a 3' oxer. It's also the first time you experience a fall, colic, or a horse's leg getting stuck in the pen's fence. Every experience you encounter around horses will improve your knowledge and horsemanship.

Horsemanship means **strengthening the bond**. The bond between a rider and a horse is one of the most beautiful things in the world. Some horses will test you and pull out all the tricks to see how to break you, and some will teach you everything you have ever wanted to know. Your horse will become your best friend, your therapist and your confidante. Your horse will hold all your secrets, dreams and wishes and they won't tell a soul. Your horse will know when you are ready and confident, and your horse will know when you are nervous and unsure. The bond between riders and horses is powerful. Having good horsemanship will strengthen your bond with your horse and will improve you as a rider.

Horsemanship means **humility** and accepting feedback. Feedback coming from other riders, coaches, judges and clinicians. You don't have to be proud or right all the time. It's okay to make mistakes and to learn from them. Being humble in the moment and accepting the feedback you receive will help you grow as a rider.

Horsemanship means **intention**. Each ride, each course and each movement needs to be made with intention. Intention for a purpose. If your purpose is to train, to have fun or correct a mistake, as long as you have intention you will get a positive outcome.

And finally, horsemanship means putting it all together. The hard work, mistakes, skills, sweat, emotions, mindfulness, attitude, experiences, bond, humility, and intention you have as an equestrian is everything to do with horsemanship. If you have all of these, you have horsemanship. Riding horses is not just an activity, it's a way of life.