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Dear McGinnis family,

Someone once asked Tom Dorrance “When do you leave square one and move on?” Tom replied “You don’t, you take square one with you.”

The idea of refining the most basic movements as you progress a horse has been the primary motif for winter horsemanship. And this week, Shayne took this refinement to a new level with our four repeat guests.

On Monday, Shayne asked everyone if they had any questions to start off with. Tom started describing how his horse at home tends to fall in on his shoulder as he goes around a turn and asked Shayne how he would correct it. This of course, is a common problem that most riders have and was the perfect question to ask because it set up for some of the most important work that Shayne would have us do this week.

But at this point, I don’t think that Shayne even know how far he would go experimenting to progress essentially one exercise—riding circles. Now of course, everything in Brannaman horsemanship begins on the ground and that’s where we started. In fact, most of the braces in our horses came out in the ground. All of the horses had the same brace in their shoulder and jaw (which we learned were connected to the hindquarters.) The nuances of balancing one on the ground kept getting more finite as the week went on. Shayne said, “I used to do just enough groundwork to get them gentle enough to ride, but I’m seeing now that most of my balance problems can be fixed and need to be fixed on the ground.”

Balancing a horse on a circle in your groundwork can only help your circles under saddle. Shayne picked up on every horse and worked through the progressions with the flag. He demonstrated how the flag could help maintain the parameters of both hind and front quarters in your circle. After he had every horse turned loose to them, he handed them back so we could feel what he was talking about. On his own horses, Shayne started experimenting with



different size circles, focusing on unity, drifting the hindquarters and rotation of the poll joint.

I felt changes happen in my horses that would have probably taken me weeks to accomplish and they were all happening in almost one ride.



At the beginning of the week, Al could barely keep his horse between his legs and by the end of the week; he was riding accurate circles, striking off into the lope with just a pet from his inside hand and a roll of his hips. Franz and Tom were both mounted on athletic, big-moving horses that are hard for some guests to stay with. Tom at one point had an amazing sliding stop that even some horses couldn't perform on the particular horse. After Franz worked on rating her horse, she was able to ride beautiful flowing leg yields that were being executed from just her upper leg. Every horse maintained forward ears and willing expressions.

The key to all the successes we had this week was not from the collected work that everyone seems to go to right away, but the loose rein work, or more important, the one rein—which leads to no-rein work. If you can balance a horse with no reins, imagine the possibilities when you do pick up on them.

On Friday, Maggie was loping her horse around to the right and Shayne told her to come across the middle and without kicking, change legs. Boom, flying lead change! Enjoy the prosperity.

Then Shayne said, "Ok, Al, your turn. I want you to do just that!" Al just started laughing and said, "The day I do a flying lead change will be the day the Seahawks win the Superbowl!"

Beautiful snow, life changing horsemanship and a good laugh couldn't have made for a better week.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Roby (your guest Highline author)