

COWBOY DRESSAGE®

Riding, Training, and Competing with Kindness as the Goal and Guiding Principle



JESSICA BLACK WITH EITAN & DEBBIE BETH-HALACHMY

FOREWORD BY DR. ROBERT MILLER

CONTENTS

Foreword	xi	Equipment	31
Note to the Reader and Photo Credits	xiii	The Bridle	31
Preface	xv	Bits	34
Eitan Beth-Halachmy	xvi	Snaffle	35
Debbie Beth-Halachmy	xxii	Curb	36
First Steps	xxiii	The Hackamore	37
Turning Points	xxvii	Other Artificial Aids	38
The Trip of a Lifetime	xxx	The Horse	39
		A Horse for Cowboy Dressage	40
One: Introducing Cowboy Dressage	1	Four: Equine Behavior	47
Accessibility	3	Horse as Precocial Prey Animal	47
Focus on the Relationship	4	Imprinting	48
Soft Feel	5	Pecking Order Is Very Important	50
Emphasis on Kindness	6	Make the Horse's Instincts Work for You	51
Cowboy Dressage or Western Dressage?	7	Use the Horse's Instincts in the Round Pen	56
		Body Language Is the Essence of	
Two: Philosophy	13	Equine Communication	56
Zeitgeist	14	A Little Psychology	57
Partnership	16	Classical Conditioning	58
The Importance of Words	19	Operant Conditioning	59
Lifestyle	22	Concluding Remarks	62
Three: Rider, Equipment, and Horse	25	Five: The Foundation	65
Cues and Aids	27	Groundwork	67
The Rider's Seat	30	Leading as a Starting Point	67



Using the Round Pen	68
Getting On	70
Classical Dressage Precepts	73
Going Forward, Turning, and Stopping	75
Going Forward	75
Turning	76
Stopping	79
Final Words about the Foundation	80

Six: Forward Motion and Engagement.....83

Engagement	84
The Gaits	86
The Walk	86
The Jog	88
The Lope	89
Additional Maneuvers	91
Backing Up	91
Turn-on-the-Haunches	92
Turn-on-the-Forehand	92
Frame	94
Collection	95
Self-Carriage	95
Transitions	99
Transitions Between Gaits	100
From Walk to Jog	102
From Jog to Walk	102
Picking up the Lope	103
Transitioning from Lope to Jog	104
Stopping	105
Transitions Between Frames	106
The Short Frame	106
From Medium to Long Frame	106
From Long to Medium Frame	107
Evaluating the Changes of Frame	107

Straightness and Bending	107	La Jineta.....	145
Defining Straightness	107	La Doma Vaquera	147
Bending	108	La Garrocha.....	149
Lateral Work	109	The Unique Combination That Is Cowboy Dressage	150
Circles	111		
Riding the Bend.....	112		
Seven: The Cowboy Dressage Court	115	Ten: Collaboration.....	153
Origins of the Court:		Light Hands Horsemanship	156
The Dressage Manège	116	Cowboy Dressage World.....	158
Transitioning to the		The Expansion of Cowboy Dressage to Related Organizations.....	158
Cowboy Dressage Court	117	Bringing Cowboy Dressage to the Rest of the World	160
The Cowboy Dressage Challenge Court.....	119	Where Do We Go from Here?	160
Eight: Competition.....	123	Afterword	165
Purpose	124	Appendix A: Cowboy Dressage Competition Rules	167
The Cowboy Dressage Tests.....	127	Appendix B: Execution and Judging of Tests...170	
Walk Jog.....	128	Appendix C: People and Organizations.....	174
Walk Jog Lope	129	References	175
The Challenge Tests	129	About the Author	176
Freestyle	130	About the Photographer.....	177
Partnership on the Ground	130	Acknowledgments.....	179
The Latest Additions	132	Index.....	180
Vaquero Style	132		
Gaited Horses	134		
The Welcome Arena.....	135		
Organizing Cowboy Dressage			
Competitions	136		
Judging Cowboy Dressage Competitions	136		
Nine: The History of Cowboy Dressage.....	139		
Classical Dressage	141		
American Cowboy	144		
The Vaquero Tradition.....	144		

The Gaits

Cowboy Dressage focuses on the three gaits natural to most horses: walk, jog, and lope. (Gaited horses can also do Cowboy Dressage; tests are being developed to allow them to demonstrate their progress in Cowboy Dressage while using their distinct gaits. See www.cowboydressage.com.)

Before reading the sections below, make sure you understand the difference between *step* and *stride*. A *step* is the movement of a single foot, from the time the hoof leaves the ground to the time it returns to the ground. Steps are often called *beats* with reference to horse gaits.

The *stride* is the entire cycle of all four feet in a horse, from the time the left hind, for example, leaves the ground to the time it strikes

the ground again after the other three feet have moved (see figs. 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3). The length of the horse's stride depends on his frame and the momentum at which he is traveling.

The Walk

The walk is a flat-footed, four-beat gait, right hind, right front, left hind, left front. The horse will always have at least two feet on the ground (fig. 6.2). The horse's head will move up and down for balance. A steady four-beat rhythm should be maintained. The tempo will vary with the speed and stride length; the average horse's normal walking speed is approximately 4 miles per hour. Cowboy Dressage distinguishes between the *working walk* and the *free*



6.2 – The walk is a four-beat gait. This means that the horse takes four steps in each stride, or the entire cycle of all four feet. For example, in this diagram, the stride begins when the horse steps forward with the right hind, followed by the right fore, then the left hind and finally the left foreleg. At the walk, a stride that begins with the right hind foot ends when the left forefoot strikes the ground.



walk. The working walk is a ground-covering gait, with light contact maintained through the aids and the face slightly above vertical. In the free walk, the rider urges the horse to stretch his neck forward and down by lengthening the reins; in this fashion, the weight of the rein will encourage the horse to lower his head. Both frame and stride will be longer, but the tempo should not change.

Both the *working* and *free walk* are essential parts of learning. Sometimes, we forget the importance of the *walk*, even when we spend a long time perfecting the jog or lope. A good walk will make everything you do with your

6.3 – *A horse needs to be warmed up before he is asked to perform any demanding maneuver. This begins with walking, which allows him to loosen his muscles and focus on the task. If you walk at the beginning of the lesson, a horse will be ready to learn. Later, the walk serves as a break between lessons and maneuvers, and a cool down after the day's work. At any time during the ride, the walk brings both rider and horse to a state of mind that facilitates communication and partnership.*

horse more enjoyable (fig. 6.3). Trail riding offers the opportunity to relax while practicing this essential gait.

Of course, it is just as important to work at the jog and lope. In fact, at times it may be a good idea to get a horse moving forward right away. Never restrict forward motion! Eitan advises letting the horse go forward when he is willing to go: “Before you restrain a horse that wants to go, ask yourself if it wouldn’t be better to let the horse move forward.”

The Jog

The Cowboy Dressage jog traces its origins back to the comfortable, ground-covering gait adopted by the cowboy who needed to traverse vast areas of land while moving the cattle. It is a two-beat diagonal gait: the horse moves his right foreleg with his left hind, and his left fore with his right hind.

The *jog* must be distinguishable from the *trot* as seen in traditional dressage. The trot features strong impulsion and suspension. The Cowboy Dressage jog does not require suspension; the horse’s relaxed back and free shoulders should be evident in a fully engaged but shorter stride. The jog must show regular rhythm and active forward motion (fig. 6.4).

Like the walk, the Cowboy Dressage jog can be either *working* or *free*. In the *working jog*, the horse moves in a steady, two-beat rhythm, with the back relaxed, the head slightly above the vertical. The rider maintains light contact with the horse. In the *free jog*, as in the *free walk*, the rider encourages the horse to stretch his neck forward and slightly down in relaxation by lengthening the reins (figs. 6.5 A & B).

Posting is optional and is encouraged if it makes the ride easier by keeping the weight of the rider off the horse’s back. The rider should not speed up when posting. The horse’s frame and stride will become longer, but the tempo stays the same at the working and free jog. A steady, regular tempo and a relaxed topline are essential to both the working and the free jog.

6.4 – *The jog is a two-beat diagonal gait. The horse takes two steps, left front, right hind followed by right front, left hind, for each stride. The stride begins when one diagonal leaves the ground and ends when the other diagonal strikes the ground (the first two feet will leave the ground again at the same time).*



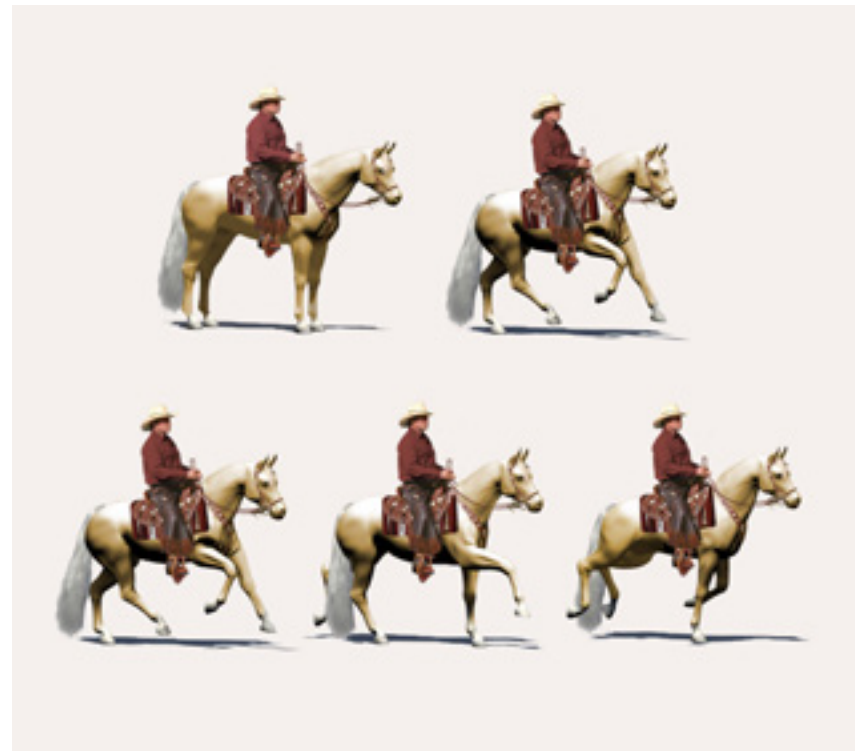


6.5 A & B – *The horse should maintain a steady even tempo at both the working and free jog. At the free jog (right), the horse stretches down into a longer frame and stride, but does not speed up. Note that in the working jog, the horse maintains a medium frame, while at the free jog he relaxes into a long frame.*

The Lope

The Cowboy Dressage lope is a comfortable, three-beat gait. The sequence of hoof beats depends on the lead. For the right lead, the horse starts the stride with the left hind leg, then moves the diagonal pair (right hind and left fore), and finishes with the right fore, which is the leading leg. (The leads are named “right” or “left” for the leading foreleg.) For the left lead, the sequence starts with the right hind leg, followed by left hind and right fore together, with the left foreleg completing the stride (fig. 6.6).

6.6 – *The lope is a rocking three-beat gait. In this image, the horse begins the right lead by pushing off with the left hind leg. Next, he moves the right hind and left fore together. Finally, he’ll finish the stride with the right foreleg.*





6.7 – As the horse lopes, the left hind foot will make contact with the ground first, then the diagonal right hind-left fore, and lastly, the right fore; by this time, the other three feet are in the air. Only the diagonal pair will be on the ground at the same time. In this picture, the horse’s left-fore/right-hind diagonal is about to strike the ground for the second beat of the working lope (medium frame), on the right lead.

Like the other working gaits, the Cowboy Dressage *working lope* is characterized by a medium frame, with the head slightly above the vertical and light contact maintained through the aids (fig. 6.7). The horse should move forward with impulsion, ready to respond to any request from the rider. For example, flying lead changes are often done at the working lope. The rider can take advantage of the horse’s stride to execute a successful change of lead by asking for the other lead on the third beat, when the horse has three feet off the ground.



6.8 – Garn Walker and Hez the Fireman complete a 20-meter circle at the lope. In Cowboy Dressage tests, the horse performs 20-meter circles at the working and free lope. Both feature a distinct, three-beat rhythm made possible by a relaxed, rounded back and engaged hindquarters.

The *free lope* is characterized by the lengthening of the reins and stride; the tempo should not vary. The free lope is the hallmark of the trained Western horse; he should be willing to lope on a loose rein without speeding up or changing the tempo.

The Cowboy Dressage lope should be noticeably different from the canter of traditional dressage, which has more impulsion, suspension, and contact with the horse’s mouth. In contrast, the image of the Cowboy Dressage lope is relaxed and comfortable, in keeping with the Western tradition (fig. 6.8).