



Body, Mind, Equine

BY CATHY WOODS
Cowgirl & Yogini

As a yoga teacher of 25 years & long-time trail rider, it was a natural, organic process that my passions combined, as there are many similarities between the two. Both yoga and horsemanship require the awareness of the present moment, breathing, the body and certainly energy. Several years ago, I decided to create a program that synergistically combined these practices into a cohesive, fun and learning workshop called The Yoga of Horsemanship TM / Body, Mind, Equine TM.

The Yoga of Horsemanship TM / Body, Mind, Equine TM. program is not about doing yoga postures on the back of your horse, although the program does incorporate a few stretches in the saddle. The program is about how to use yoga and yogic principals to improve your horsemanship from ground to saddle. I do not claim to be a horse trainer or riding instructor, my goal is to assist students in becoming more aware, conscious riders. This program is relaxing, fun and educational and can be enjoyed by all, including new riders and yogis with or without experience. Those that do have experience with my program can gain new, refreshing insights and receive beneficial reminders with each session.

A typical session includes, time on the mat with centering meditations, good stretches for riders, hip openers, back stretches, core work, balances poses and the like. We then work on practices such as body scans, deep relaxations, breathing techniques (pranayama, yogic breath-work). There is a discussion period about applying the principles of yoga to horsemanship and the parallels of each practice. The program includes hand outs of recommended reading and other pertinent information. We then move into the arena with the horses beginning our ground work. The horses are great mirrors of our energy. If we come to them with fragmented, scattered, nervous energy, this is often what we receive back. If we come to them with centered, calm energy this is typically what we receive in return. We begin by feeling the energy of different horses with some leading exercises, we progress into the saddle, applying our breathing techniques and body awareness practices from the mat. We stay in the present moment, aware of our energy, the energy of our horse and the energies around us. From here, riders are instructed throughout various gentle



4 Essential Yoga Poses for Equestrians:

Warrior 1 Leg strengthening poses are very helpful for equestrians for being able to mount and dismount with ease or for posting in some riding disciplines. In addition, a rider should be riding with the use of their legs, not so much their hands. Legs help to guide your horse, and to help you stay in your saddle.

Plank Pose Core work is most excellent for riders. Everything comes from the core. Keeping a strong core also helps keep a strong back.

Boat Pose Balance postures are essential for riders. Knowing & understanding where “your center is” is an important component when in the saddle. If you are riding in front or back of your center you will be off balance, affecting your balance, stability, safety and even your horses movement.

Pigeon Pose Keeping the hips open & free not only provides more comfort while sitting astride a horse and allows one to mount/dismount with more ease, it allows the hips to flow in a more relaxed way with the movement of the horse (which also changes the horses movement).

experiences. Depending on the venue, there is sometimes an optional, led bareback segment, which can be a highlight for students who have never experience such a connection with a horse. Programs can be offered as half day events, several day retreats, some including trail rides.

I have been lucky to share my program with people all over the all over the country. Most recently, I visited The Resort at Paws Up in Montana to offer the program to guests as an addition to their existing yoga program. The beautiful indoor arena and yoga space created a wonderful backdrop for the program, and were then able to apply what they learned to trail rides with gentle horses and experienced guides.

Cathy Woods, ERYT 500, teaches yoga as an “awareness practice” to be used on & off the mat. In addition, she leads a program called, Body, Mind, Equine, combining her passions of yoga & horsemanship, teaching how yogic principals can be used to improve one’s horsemanship to become a more aware & conscious rider.

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