

# No Breeches REQUIRED

Chris Newbert and Smart Chics Are Rare performing a demonstration at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

**Western dressage merges the traditions of the West with classical dressage principles.**

**Story and photos by Holly Clanahan**

THE SEED WAS FIRST PLANTED ABOUT four years ago, when legendary horseman Jack Brainard (See Page 18) was killing a little time in between performances at the Road to the Horse colt-starting challenge, where he was a judge.

He stopped off at the booth of Dr. Robert Miller, a longtime friend and author of "Imprinting the Foal," for a visit. Instead, Jack became transfixed at a video playing there of "a man on a black horse, doing some fabulous moves." Dr. Miller told him it was Eitan Beth-Halachmy, doing what he called "cowboy dressage."

Jack couldn't get it out of his mind, and once he got home, he ordered a copy of the video.

"I watched that video every night," he says. "I couldn't believe it. ... I wanted to try some of that stuff, so I started playing with it."

The next year, Eitan attended Road to the Horse, and he and Jack met in person. Turns out, Eitan had read one of Jack's books, and he was a big fan.

Actually, "fan" might not be how Eitan describes it with his dry sense of humor.

"There is something about that man," Eitan says. "He stole every idea that I had. It's kind of frustrating to know someone who thinks the way you do or says things the way you say it. The more I talked to him, the more he kind of (ticked) me off because he's stealing stuff



from me.”

Then he laughs: “Can you see that I just have a different sense of humor?”

Eitan, who’s now 70, and Jack, now 89, have had very different trajectories – one found fame in the Morgan-horse world and the other as a reining-horse icon – but both seemed to find their way to the same ideologies. Now, as Jack embraced the idea of cowboy, or western, dressage, their paths were merging and a fast friendship was being formed.

“I find Jack a great friend and a good mentor,” Eitan says, serious now. “There are a lot of things I’m learning from him, and I think there are a lot of things that he has learned from me, which makes it really kind of joyful.”

Jack says, “I had always believed in dressage principles.” Now, he believes the future lies in spreading the word of how beneficial those principles can be to western horses – using dressage maneuvers to supple and improve the athleticism of stock-type horses, without asking riders to wear breeches or give up their western saddles.

Western dressage “has more potential than anything that has happened in the horse business in history,” Jack says. “Why? Because we’re going to show people how to ride better horses.”

And so, just as Jack has been present at the birth of a number of other associations, now he and Eitan are helping bring another one into being: the Western Dressage Association of America. The two men, who both teach western dressage clinics, are listed as the inspiration behind the new association.

With the discipline still in its infancy, western dressage has already been recognized as a competitive event by the United States Equestrian Federation in the Morgan division, and both Eitan and Jack hope that it continues to grow.

Western dressage was given an international spotlight at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, held last fall in Lexington, Kentucky, where

Eitan and one of his students were to put on a demonstration each of the 16 days.

In the games’ opening ceremonies, though, Eitan suffered a near-fatal heart problem and was rushed to the hospital. Thankfully, he recovered fully and began riding just a few months later.

But at the games, Eitan’s student, Chris Newbert of Wentworth, New Hampshire, continued on with the demos, determined to give western dressage the exposure he felt it deserved. He recruited help from clinicians like AQHA Professional Horsewoman Lynn Palm and Pat Parelli, and as they spoke about the importance of dressage exercises, Chris performed the maneuvers aboard his American Quarter Horse, Smart Chics Are Rare, or “Chico,” a son of Smart Chic Olena.

Chris is also a longtime student of Jack’s, and he’s just as enthused about the new discipline as Jack is.

“This is not about throwing a western saddle on a normal dressage horse,” Chris says. “This is about riding western horses with the principles of classical dressage and making them better. There’s no question it makes the horses better.

“When you get a horse that can go along and put its haunches in, put its haunches out, shoulder in, shoulder out, do it on a circle, do it on a straight line, with almost invisible cues, you have a horse that’s really going to do almost anything for you, and do it softly, which is what’s so nice,” Chris says. “I would think that would be the wider appeal to the western riders, that this can become the foundation for any kind of discipline.” 🐾

Visit [www.westerndressageassociation.com](http://www.westerndressageassociation.com) to learn more. Or visit Jack’s and Eitan’s websites, [www.jackbrainard.com](http://www.jackbrainard.com) and [www.cowboydressage.com](http://www.cowboydressage.com), respectively, to learn more about their books and DVDs. Visit [americashorsedaily.com](http://americashorsedaily.com) and search for “western dressage” to find online-exclusive photos and more rider interviews.



**Pam Rice of Leakey, Texas, and Holey's Cutter Belle at one of Jack Brainard's western dressage clinics.**