

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

TIME IS ON MY SIDE

When someone buys a horse from me, I always say, “They are paying for my time.” Obviously, they are paying for the horse, hopefully it’s a good horse, but what makes a horse great is the length of quality time you spend on your horse. Quality time is what most people do not schedule enough of in their lives or for their horses. Like a fine wine, whisky or a great piece of art, it takes time to develop. In the horses case time is needed to cultivate a superior product or individual.

I shake my head when people suggest I train a “finished horse” in one-hundred-twenty days, or even ninety, sixty, or in just thirty days. That’s ridiculous! Training cannot be put on a time schedule. The time needed to learn varies from horse to horse. Just like with people, we learn at different speeds. Most people go to school for twelve years and at that point are just beginning their education. If we are really lucky we have the opportunity to go on to college and normally after a four-year period you will receive a degree. At that point if we wish to specialize we will continue with our education for many additional years before actually being qualified to practice an area of expertise. Think about it! Doctors and lawyer’s fees seem exorbitant, but it is their time we are paying for. Education takes time. When allowed to finally practice a profession the most valuable result of time is the greatest teacher of all and that is experience. This valuable commodity or asset cannot be purchased and no one can give it to you. The bottom line is it takes time to develop great doctors, lawyers, teachers, athletes, horses and horseman. The most valuable result of time is the greatest teacher of all and that is experience.

Good horses don’t become great without expending the necessary effort but don’t forget the old saying, “Horses seek the level of the rider.” What I am saying is that all the time in the world spent on a horse will be no good if the person applying the training time is not effective. Great horseman or trainers are definitely made and not born. How does a horseman become good or even great? He needs quality guidance, an open mind and like the horse, lots of time. No one can learn horsemanship overnight, in a few days or even in a few months. Good horsemanship is an art form and quite frankly, to people’s dismay, it will take years to develop this skill correctly. I know that is not what enthusiasts want to hear but it is the truth. Hey—not to be discouraged! My suggestion is to think like a horse. In my humble opinion, horses do not think in terms of time like humans. Humans think in terms of minutes, hours, days, months and years. In all my travels working with thousands of horses, I have never seen one horse wearing a watch. Time for horses means time to eat, time to move, time to breed, the length of day and the length of night. They definitely take life one day at a time. This attitude of the horse is the way I believe humans need to approach training.

Life for the horse is not about “hurry-up” or how fast you get things accomplished. I like to train horses in a way they do not know they are being trained. In other words, not regiments of making things happen on a “time schedule.” I try to ride each horse just like he is today, do a good job, and maybe tomorrow he will be a little better and the next day better than that. The best trainers do not think in terms of time. Work each horse as an individual. Do not push too hard or too fast on yourself or your horse. People often expect too much too fast of themselves and their horse.

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My suggestion is to slow down, think like a horse and remember quality training is not accomplished in a hurry. Big league trainers work with their young prospects almost two years before the first big show, event or futurity. As a horseman I say, “Give it some time.” The old vaquero attitude, “If we don’t get it today, we will get it tomorrow, mañana.”

Remember with horses we are dealing with a mind and personality; in many cases we are dealing with a young mind and a young personality. Horses did not come into the world knowing what we do or do not want of them. It takes time for them to figure things out! Horses must learn to learn; learning takes time, not only for the horse but for the horseman. Being in a hurry only causes frustration and frustration will only get in the way of learning. Slow down! You will not do a good job if you fight with your horse, yourself or with time. Fighting time is about patience. Time and patience should be allies not enemies. When these dimensions are working with you and not against you, then—like the best horseman, time will be on your side.

—*Craig Cameron*