

# *Craig Cameron*

## **Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen**

### **CONSISTENTLY CONSISTENT**

I am often asked, “What is the most important facet of horsemanship?” The answer to that giant question is vast and varied. One answer could be knowledge; the understanding of the horse itself. Yet another answer could be the knowledge to use this information which could be called experience. You could say the horse is the most important fascist of horsemanship. Here we are talking about breeding conformation or maybe disposition is the most important. The list is endless: Environment, handling, bits, equipment or style of training. These items could go on and on and each one is important. But one major factor that you do not hear much about is one I consider extremely important to obtain high quality horsemanship. This component is consistency.

To make great horses, I think a trainer not only needs to be good but consistent in his teaching and training routines. I think many people are just fooling themselves to think they can really do a good job training a horse without constant reinforcement. Consistency creates a coherent uniform reliability in horses. To put it simply, horses thrive on routine that means they like consistency.

Even in the wild horse herds create their own routines and consistency. They have feeding habits, moving habits, watering habits, and breeding routines. They live by a herd instinct which promotes a constant herd order and hierarchy. These instincts create a normal day to day routine of constancy that makes the world of this amazing prey animal somewhat consistent. This consistency allows horses to feel somewhat safe, relaxed and comfortable even in the wild.

In an unnatural environment, like the environment of a training program, it is extremely important for the horseman to create a comfortable environment for his horses. This comfort comes from a consistent training routine. In my opinion horses do not like constant change. I think they do better and understand quicker with constant routine. Horses begin to know what to expect with routine. They begin to learn from one day to the next, what it is that you want and do not want of them. Constant routines of feeding, handling, saddling, riding, and even hauling, make a horse feel safe, sure, certain, and secure. There will always be days of change because progress is a function of time and intensity with some changes. Training is actually development through gradual increasing changes, but changes should be introduced slowly and methodically for the best results. These slow changes become part of a horse’s consistency. Horses begin to expect it and it becomes part of the routine.

Consistency makes a good routine that horses actually enjoy. At my ranches the routine is constant. Feeding is done at the same time and the horses are looking forward to seeing us at that time. I do not allow rowdy handlers. I like good people that have a personal relationship with each horse. After feeding, catching horses is next. Then tying and brushing which the horses seem to enjoy. Then saddling and perhaps warming up depending upon each horse’s routine.

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My horses are worked in a variety of ways. On the trails, in the arenas, at the round pens, or on one of the exciting Craig Cameron challenge trails. Changing the order from one day to the next makes my time with each horse a highlight for both the horse and me. It keeps a routine new, fun, exciting, and worthwhile, with some place to go and something to do. Even on the trails I develop such maneuvers as stops, backs, spins, lead work and lateral movement. Not all training has to be done in an arena. With this style of training routine many times a horse never thinks of it as a boring training session. Training is actually a fun experience with this variety.

The best horsemen ride their horses at least five times a week with consistency to achieve the desired progress especially in the beginning. Quiet repetitive work allowing a horse to learn a behavior, not force him do the things we want, achieves the quickest and best results.

Consistency creates compatibility, and compatibility creates trust. Trust is a belief. A belief in the horse of man, that man can be okay and through this consistent handling that life can not only be alright but can be great. A consistent routine develops a horse that will meet you at the gate with a look in his eyes that says, "I'm ready to go." Remember as a horseman always be consistently consistent.

*Ride Smart*