

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

THE FIRST RIDE INTO THE PASTURE

The graduation of a young horse from the round pen to his first ride in the outside world is an important and big step in his and your life. The preparation work in the round corral, the gentling process, desensitizing, saddling, ground driving, and correct introduction of the snaffle bit is what has gotten you to this crucial part of your horses' education. Safety is paramount for you and your horse. The guiding system, although in the elementary stages, must be in place. With the snaffle bit you are able to bend your horse with, of course, one rein at a time. Remember that pulling on both reins only stiffens your horse and allows him to brace against you giving you nothing but a high-headed, horse and a loss of control. Flexibility is the key. If you can bend him, you can turn him and if you can turn him, you can stop him; obviously the key ingredient on your first ride into the pasture.

My recommendation is to ride with a friend who is mounted on a good, gentle horse. A gentle, experienced horse will give the young equine security and act as an anchor and magnet to help control and teach the youngster horse. Riding with the snaffle bit on the rookie horse it is important not to pull, hang, or balance on his face. Try to turn him loose and go with him as a passenger and partner. Follow the older horse on a loose rein. Remember to sit slow and deep. AS a rider, if you tense up, lean forward, or sit faster than the rhythm of your body in many ways controls the rate of tempo of your horse. If he does speed up to the point of control loss, slow him by bending him with one rein the same as we did on the preparation rides in the round pen.

When a young horse speeds up, your riding partner on the older horse must slow down or stop, acting as magnet, helping to control and relax our speedy young friend. Try to get in to a position behind the older horse. Follow mostly in a walk or trot when possible. The best part of my training in the beginning is done in these two gaits. Allowing the horse to understand what I want and mostly help to do it is what is important and this is best done at the slow paces of the walk or trot. When riding behind the older horse, use one rein to bend him in a 360-degree circle with a give and take motion on the rein, not a steady pull. As the horse gives, you give. Guide, don't pull. Pulling only causes the horse to pull back, a contest you do not ever want to get in to. As your young horse comes out of the small circle, release both reins and continue in a controlled walk or trot. Next, go the other direction. Continue this slow educational process down the trail allowing your horse to follow the feel of the bit, leading with his nose, and coming through with his feet. His reward is the straight line after the circle each time on a loose rein.

On the first ride you can also work some easy stops. Following your friend on the older horse, tell him to stop. As your horse walks into the stopped older horse use steady, even but alternate pulls on your reins stopping the motion in your body and say "whoa." When your horse stops release the rein pressure, allowing him to relax. Continue this process back to the barn and stay slow and in control. Do not expect perfection or too much from your horse or yourself on the first ride out.

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He's learning and learning takes time. You will be surprised how good you will be in just a few days' time. Remember, be a slow hand with your reins. Direct and support with your reins, legs, hands, and mind. You're developing a language between yourself and your horse, a language that will last his entire lifetime. Today is only the first ride of hopefully thousands. With patience and understanding this communication and friendship should grow into a perfect unity called HORSE-MAN-SHIP.

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