

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

“BREAKING” HORSES

- When do I break my horse?
- How do I break my horse?
- Where do I break my horse?
- What is the best method to break my horse?
- How long will it take to break my horse?

These are common questions that people often ask of me. I understand the term “breaking,” and I use it too. However, I am not really out to “break” the horse. My objective is to educate, communicate, and make a friend of the horse.

When do I start educating the horse? The day he is born would be a good day to start. From the beginning, I want to be a part of my horse’s life. Like the wind, the sky, the sun, the birds, and his Momma I want to be a part of all the things he does not have to be afraid of. As an animal of prey this is an important lesson that I try to teach the horse each day of his life. That lesson is: “I am not going to hurt you.” Whether the horse is one day, one week, one month, one year, ten years old or older, I am working through the language of a feel. This feel will not only be physical but mental and emotional and as horse people, we need to be aware that we are working with the horse on all three of these levels (Physical, mental, and emotional).

The horse does not come into this world knowing what the human being wants or does not want of him. It is our job as teachers and trainers to make him understand our wants. This is the making of an outstanding horse and a true horseman. It is responsibility and ability.

It is the responsibility of a horseman to be able to communicate with the horse in a way he can understand. This responsibility creates ability in the horse if done correctly. I always say, “Start at the beginning.” Each horse is unique and an individual. Let him tell you where he’s good, where he’s bad, and where he needs help. Get great at reading and listening to your horse. Watch the ears, eyes, tilt of his head, body, position, and expression. Is he licking his lips or blinking his eyes? These are indicators of understanding, confusion, acceptance, nervousness, or relaxation. Like the turn indicators on a car, these signs should tell you which way to go. Let the horse teach and tell you as much as you will ever teach or tell him.

When working with a foal I find he will stay more relaxed if you keep the mare in the same pen or nearby. Make the sessions as stress free as possible. Be natural around your horses. By nature, horses do not like loud noises or fast movements. Handle the foal gently. Your objective would be for the foal to accept your easy touch from head to hoof. At this young stage in the horse’s life remember that you have plenty of time. Everything does not have to be accomplished in one session. Find the time to make many short sessions. The foal will quickly accept your presence, your touch, the halter, soft ropes, and even the saddle pad. He will learn to learn and learn to give. If you are a good teacher, the foal (or any horse) will not dread your coming but look

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forward to it. Don't be surprised when they meet you at the gate with curious minds and friendly eyes. Remember, teaching is the art of communication.

Ride Smart