

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

ONE REIN WONDER

In horsemanship you hear a lot about the one rein technique, the one rein bend, the one rein flex, and the one rein stop. What you don't hear is how to use this one rein technique and how to develop it.

To me, the reason for using the One Rein Wonder is that you do not give the horse as much to brace or pull against. The natural instinct for the horse is to go against pressure, and not give to pressure. The bit of course creates or works off pressure as do our hands, legs, lead rope, halters, and spurs, whether you are on the ground or on the horses' back.

Our job as riders and trainers is to teach a horse to yield to pressure; however, it is our responsibility to release that pressure as the horse gives to the pressure. In maneuvers as simple as a turn or as complicated as a spin, remember it is the release that gives the horse the incentive to do the things you ask him to do. It is the release that makes the horse great! If someone pinches you it will not be the pinch you are interested in, it will be the release. What this boils down to is that a large part of horsemanship is about pressure and release and it is the rider who initiates both. So what does all this have to do with the one rein method?

In the earliest phases of horsemanship whether or not you are aware of it, all riders use one rein techniques. As you halter break a horse how many reins or lead rope do you use? One of course, and if it is used correctly it is extremely effective. When a young or green horse will not lead up in the halter, what is the most effective remedy? It is to step to the side and lead or bend the horse with one rein, and almost every horse will step up and follow that bend or feel. Bending or guiding with one rein makes it easy for the horse to understand. When we lunge a horse it is done with one rope and with that one rope it is easy to send, bend or stop the horse by bending and disengaging his hindquarters. In our ground work we can control all parts of the horse down to his feet. We can achieve undeniable controlled forward movement, lateral movement and the backup. We can send the horse over jumps, obstacles, and into the trailer, and all with just one rein. Now if we could take this one rein technique from the ground, which the horse already understands, and apply it from his back this should be a somewhat easy transition for the horse to make and understand. Why? Because the horse is already doing it from the ground!

The trouble starts many times for the horse when we give the rider two reins. If you give someone two reins it is just going to be natural for them to pull on both reins. The more nervous or unsure the rider gets, the more he pulls those reins especially if the rider feels he is getting out of control. Keep in mind the bit works on pressure, if you pull hard enough it works on pain. The problem with pulling on two reins is that it is easy and natural for the horse to brace or pull back against this pressure. In other words, when the pull is strong enough especially on a young or even older horse he is forced to protect himself from the pressure of the bit. To do this he raises his head or gaps his mouth open searching for some form of release. When a horse does this enough times it becomes a habit. Habit is the easiest thing to make and the hardest thing to break. I keep saying, "stop pulling and start guiding your horse instead."

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

When one learns the one rein technique he can avoid many bad habits created by the two rein dilemma. For example, instead of pulling on two reins for a stop one can simply bend a horse to a stop using one rein. The more you bend any horse the more you control the hindquarters. It is the same way as you trained him with the halter. As time goes on you refine the cue by progressively using more of the second or indirect rein as a brace to keep the horse straight. So to stop a horse, use the left rein. The right rein is for straightness. Instead of always just pulling on two reins it is more of a signal allowing the horse to understand that this means stop your feet.

I feel the most basic reining maneuver is the lateral flex. This is done with one rein at a time and teaches a horse flexibility. Without flexibility you do not have position and without position you lose control. The simplest and first technique I teach is one rein turning, which starts the guiding system – from there begin simple round outs or small circles. I progress from this direct reining style by simply adding the supporting or outside rein, as the horse tells me he is ready. Eventually the outside rein gives me straightness and control of the hindquarters. However, all good things will come in time. The use of the ancient snaffle bit has its roots in one rein work and for me still does today. One of the beauties of the snaffle bit is that I can work one rein at a time to teach and finally refine my horses' maneuvers. More advanced bits are not receptive to one rein techniques and should be used later in training when the horse is ready and prepared. Ride your horse like he is today, do a good job and tomorrow he will be better.

This one rein process is an extremely effective one for developing your touch, feel and timing. It will take some thought and practice on your part, but I always say, "Horsemanship is a thinking-man's game. So give it a try and work the One Rein Wonder."

Ride like a champion!

—*Craig Cameron*