

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

PREDATOR OR PREY

Many people have trouble with horses because they try to relate to the horse as if the horse was human. This is a mistake. Horses do not think like humans. I keep emphasizing—understand the nature of the horse. It is something we must remember, horses do not interpret the world the same as you or I, the horse is a prey animal. Therefore, he reacts to certain circumstances differently than humans do.

What is a prey animal?

It is an animal that other animals eat. Think about it. That is exactly what makes horses so nervous and unsure. It is the nature of the horse to be afraid; in a sense, being afraid is natural. Fear is the very element that has insured the survival of the horse from the beginning of time. Nature gave him four legs, big lungs, and the gift of speed. Nature said, “If you even think there is a problem, then run. If you can’t run, then bite, kick, buck, or paw. Do whatever it takes to survive.” That, fellow horse-people, is called instinct.

Human Nature

On the other hand, we have human nature. Humans are not prey animals; quite the opposite. Humans have always been and still are the predator. We are aggressive hunters—meat eaters. I am sure that to the horse we smell just like what we eat—meat. So I say to you, understand the nature of the two beasts—man and horse. One is predator and one is prey; both very different but in some ways also the same. Man and horse want and need to feel safe, sure, certain, and secure. It is your job as a trainer to make sure you give these things to your horse.

Emotional Factors

Both animals, man and horse, can feel emotion: happy, sad, troubled, bothered, excited, anticipation, and many more. Remember that your horse has good days and bad days just like you do. Do not expect him to be perfect each day. The better you understand the nature of the horse, the better you will get along and be able to teach and train your horse. When you understand a horse does things because of this prey mentality, it will keep you from getting mad, impatient, or upset with your horse. Take a deep breath and remember that it is in his nature to be afraid. The most important thing I do each day with each horse, no matter how old, how young, or how many rides he’s had is to take the fear out of my horse. Let him know and allow him to believe that I will never hurt him. It is everything to the horse.

Never take it for granted when this amazing animal of prey, the horse, allows the predator, that’s you, right up on his back. That’s trust. Work on it, and keep riding like a champion.

—*Craig Cameron*