

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

TO SPUR OR NOT TO SPUR?

One of the most controversial pieces of equipment in the horse industry today is the spur. I have actually had people tell me that if I am a spur user, I am a bad horseman. That is a bold face-to-face statement considering that I am almost always wearing spurs. However, if the negative statement about spur users is true, at least I am in good company. Some of the greatest horsemen that I know and have ridden with are users of the spur. I will admit however, that the spur, like any other piece of equipment is only as good as the person using it. Many horse people have no business using a spur but by the same token, some people, who in a humane gesture, do not use who are not using spurs, should.

You might ask which people should or shouldn't use spurs and why. There are many people who are wearing the spur for the wrong reasons and do not understand the use of this functional tool. Unfortunately for the horse, there are a good many of us humans who are only wearing the spur as a fashion statement. These fashion plates are many times the ones guilty of kicking, jabbing, and using the spur as a weapon. This type of use understandably makes the horse nervous and apprehensive. On the other hand, the "humane" group who go spurless are many times the ones guilty of over kicking their equine friend with this ineffective cue. I am not saying that you must always wear spurs, nor am I saying that you must always go without. I am saying let the horse situation, circumstance, and common sense dictate the when and where.

No matter whether you are riding English or Western, good horsemanship is good horsemanship. Like any piece of equipment the spurs should fit you and your horse. Length and shank and type of rowel are again determined by horse situation and circumstance. Personally, I like a medium length shank with a chap guard and a dull round rowel. When used correctly, the spur simply enables me to communicate better with my horse.

A spurless heel creates too much kicking of the horse by the rider. A sharp rowel used too hard makes nervous, unsure horses. A dull rowel used correctly allows me to communicate effectively by allowing me to use a lighter touch to gain the response that I am seeking from the horse. In my opinion spurs are for pressing, pushing, or squeezing. This communication with my feet is like all communication with horsemanship. It is the language of a feel. My job is to see how little it takes to get the right response - not how much. As the horse gives, I give and as the horse yields, I yield. This is what I call speaking horse to the horse. Now remember that experience is the best teacher and give yourself the time necessary to get good, light, and effective with your spurs.

It is not for me to say whether you should or should not use spurs. I only know that the spur allows me to be lighter, easier, and therefore better with my horse. So, ultimately, the question is to spur or not to spur. Think about it and remember to look at it from your horses' point of view. The answer is up to you.

Craig Cameron