

# *Craig Cameron*

## **Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen**

### **WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND – THE ROUND PEN**

I hear a lot about the round pen or round corral these days. Folks talk about why you need one and I hear plenty of conversation on how to use this popular “new” tool; after all, it is a tool. However, the round corral is not a new invention. Where did it come from? How long has it been around and who gets credit for inventing this ingenious contraption? Answering these questions might be like asking who invented the wheel.

I have heard that master horseman, Buster Welch should get credit. Maybe, but I think Mr. Welch mostly perfected the use of the round corral as a means to help train cutting horses and not the actual inventor of this circular device. I asked the “Father” of new wave horsemanship Tom Dorrance himself who invented the round pen. The old philosopher told me he remembered seeing old, dilapidated round corrals even as a kid. I think circus performers have been using round enclosures for many, many years in their incredible equine acts. Even the Roman Coliseum was round. So who invented the round pen? Maybe only the horse people know. These pens have been around for a long time and this longevity is probably the best indicator that something must be positive about this mystic circle.

So what is so great about the round pen? What makes it so much better than a square pen or any other geometric form? The round pen has been my classroom and my stage for twenty years. When it comes to livestock, especially the training or re-training of the equine, it is second to none. To appreciate the beauty of the round pen one must understand the nature of the horse. The horse is a prey animal. As a prey animal the strongest instinct in time of trouble is the instinct to flee. This instinct and the ability to do it is literally everything to the horse. As horse people, we must understand the importance of this and recognize the round pen does not take this all important flight away from the horse. Whether starting, working, reconditioning, or just riding when in this round environment, it keeps the trainer at a comfortable but close distance without stealing the flight instinct of the horse. This is a confidence builder for both horse and rider. The old style of hobbling, blind-folding, or snubbing the unstarted, unsure, or unprepared horse could sometimes be a recipe for disaster. Taking away the ability to run from a wild, unstarted, or problem horse is taking away his security of flight. The round pen does not do this; it leaves the security blanket in place.

In the contradiction of a square pen, the horse literally gets cornered up with no place to go. With the flight instinct taken away by the corners, a scared horse will kick, buck, paw, bite, freeze up, or jump out. The instinct of survival is so strong for the horse, that when threatened, he doesn't mind hurting or even killing himself. This is a strong instinct. If you are on him or in the way, he will take you with him. The round corral helps eliminate this corner dilemma.

There are many types and sizes of round corrals today. What about the totally enclosed round pen? This solid structure is not my favorite. In my opinion, it is not natural and tends to make the horse nervous and claustrophobic. I have seen many horses try to escape or jump out of this blind confinement. Open pens allow a horse to see his surroundings enabling him to be more

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natural and more relaxed. As to what size I prefer, my answer varies and depends on what job I am doing. At my Double Horn ranches in Texas and New Mexico, where I start many horses and hold many clinics, I have numerous round pens. For colt starting, warming horses up, and conditioning of riders and horses, I make frequent use of the fifty foot round corral. This pen is also the perfect place to safely hobble break, teach trailer loading, introduce bit, desensitize, and teach horse and rider confidence in a controlled environment. I have seventy foot pens for more advanced riding. I even make use of my one hundred and twenty foot round corral for classroom and cattle work. The round pen is a wonderful tool for both horse and rider with no corners giving the freedom of continual riding.

There are many types of portable round pens on the market today. I recommend a panel made exclusively for horses. Research and find a panel that is secure and safe for both man and horse. A benefit of a portable pen is that it can easily be moved. These portable panels can be easily added to or subtracted from to make larger or smaller corrals. Another important factor for a portable pen is that if you or your horse runs into or hits this type of corral it gives and moves. This is good because in a permanent pen the only thing that gives is you or your horse. With thousands of horses under my belt, the panel that I recommend and prefer is the horse safe panel made by The Priefert Manufacturing Company of Mt. Pleasant, Texas. Like me, Priefert has decades of experience.

If there is a better way, why not use it? The round pen is the best way. Bear in mind this circle is not a place to run your horse down. It is a place to that allows your horse to get more sure; sure about you and what you are asking him to do. The round pen is a classroom. It is about communication and communication is two minds listening and two minds open; you and your horse. Be patient, and remember what goes around comes around.

Keep Riding!!

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