

KNOW YOUR HORSE: KNOW YOUR TRAINER

In the last issue of Horseback, in order to insure your success in this great sport of cutting, I shared some tips and guidelines to help you select the right horse for yourself and your program. Of course, nothing is 100% certain, and there are no guarantees that you won't end up with the wrong horse in spite of taking all the proper precautions.

Case in point...

Jimmy Bush and I went to the Northwest Futurity in Yakima, WA in 1974. After the Futurity, there was an NCHA Classic class. Jimmy and I were finished and were leaving the arena when Mel McQuire, the man who was putting on the event, asked me to turn back for him. I told Mel didn't have a turnback horse, and he told me to "go get that bay horse tied to the fence over there". So, I took the horse and during his run, was thinking to myself, wow, this is a super nice horse, maybe he needs to go home with me. I decided to inquire about buying him when I was through. When I left the arena, I tied him to the fence and turned around, and there stood the biggest, maddest cowboy I had ever seen. Well, he started calling me everything in the book, and told me that I had a lot of *@#! nerve helping myself to his best show horse!!! (I had accidently grabbed the wrong bay horse) I thought he was going to kill me right there and then in front of everyone. At that point, Jimmy decided to intervene on my behalf, and informed the man that he had spoken with me and had convinced me not to charge him for tuning his horse! (Nothing like a dear friend to run interference in a pinch) I was sure I was in for a beating. Amazingly, the man started laughing and decided to let me live. He went on to win his class, thank goodness, and was generous enough to credit me with his success that day. Moral of the story... be very careful when choosing your horse!

Now that you have purchased your new partner, it's time to start looking for professional help. He or she will maintain your horse so it doesn't develop bad habits while you are developing your own skills as a cutter. You want to look for a trainer that has been successful showing, training and most important of all, someone who is an excellent teacher. To find someone with these talents will require some research and time. This person will probably not be the closest or the least expensive, so don't let those things dictate your choice. The time you spend with this professional should be of the highest quality and a tremendous learning experience every time you ride. If the trainer is rude and verbally abusive, and you are not having fun during your training sessions – which is the whole point of riding horses – you will not advance as quickly as you will with a trainer who takes the time to stop and explain what they're doing and why, with clarity and respect. Remember, you are paying this person for their expertise and professionalism. You are NOT paying them to be an abusive dictator who takes your hard earned money, destroys your confidence and makes you or your horse's life miserable.

When choosing your trainer, there are several things you can do before making your final decision. Talk to other amateurs who are already showing, and get their opinions about trainers in the area that are in the business of developing cutters and are interested in teaching riders. Visit these trainers at their facilities and take a close look at their operation, their barns, their horses, etc. Are they clean and well kept, are the arenas worked up daily and have the proper footing that's not going to hurt your horse during the training process?

(Too hard will injure hocks and stifles, too deep will stress tendons and ligaments). Watch them work their horses. Do they work them too long and too hard until they look overstressed? Are their eyes bright and ears forward or are they jumpy and nervous? (Or worse yet, dull and unresponsive.) Are they bleeding and swollen around their mouths or on their shoulders and flanks? Do they run around with their mouths open trying to avoid contact with the bit because their tongues have been cut and or partially severed? Vicious yanking and spurring is not an acceptable form of horsemanship. It's most unfortunate, but these things are more common than you might think. Make sure that your chosen trainer has as much compassion and respect for your horse as they do for you. Do not let them beat up your horse! That is not training, it is ABUSE. Just like yourself, your horse will develop and flourish under positive conditions. It will defeat your purpose if your horse is destroyed in the process of your training program. Many trainers are only interested in selling you a new horse, rather than working with the one you purchased from someone else. Don't be the next victim of these so called professionals. They are the reason so many new cutters abandon their dreams after only a year or two, and so many talented horses learn to hate their jobs.

Once you've found the right trainer and facility, take the time to sit down with this trainer and discuss your goals. Talk about and agree upon the cost of training for yourself and your horse. Ask how long your training sessions will last and what they will consist of. What kind of time frame is it going to take to achieve your goals? What are the costs involved in showing your horse? What kind of support can you expect from your trainer at the shows? Will they provide grooming and tacking services, what are the proper warm up procedures, will they arrange for help and assist you in the show pen? Do they offer coaching while you show your horse? The more support they can provide, the more successful you'll be and the more fun you'll have. Bottom line, keep things on a professional level with your trainer and expect them to act accordingly. Remember the TASTE method:

Truth, Accountability, Support, Trust, Energy.

Offer this to your horse and trainer and you can expect the same in return.

Until next time... Cut clean, quit clean and have fun in the middle!