

Trainers Tips

December 2009

"What to look for in the Penning Prospect"

with Dave Fraser

With most of the major Pennings now over for the season, many Penners are going to attend some smaller winter series or practices. The 'off' season is a good time to be on the lookout for a new mount for the upcoming show year. This month we will talk about converting a prospect horse that has been used in other disciplines to a Penning horse, as well as some training techniques to start a Penning horse.

Conformation wise, I prefer a horse that is 14.2 – 15 hands tall with muscling & flat bone. The neck should come out of the shoulders low and the horse should have a keen eye & ear. I've found that the lower the tail set the most horses want to work off their hind quarters. Low hocks, short cannon bones and good feet are also desirable attributes. A Penning horse needs to be reasonably calm and have a forgiving personality. (We Penners are often guilty of kicking & pulling at the same time.) Too flighty of horse can disturb the herd, making cattle wilder than necessary. Horses which you can be smooth and methodical on will outshine those that want to be fast & furious. Heart & desire goes a long way in being successful.

I've had great success in converting horses started our used in other disciplines and introducing them to the Penning game. These prospects may include a 'Cutter' that won't stay hooked for 2 ½ minutes, a 'Reiner' that won't change leads in the middle as clean as it needs to, or just a well started ranch horse that may need to be taught to handle its' shoulders, ribs, or hips better. My Penning horse is also an outstanding Heel horse. I just have to remember to "Be the Pilot, Not the Passenger" whichever event I am doing, and I can be successful.

Many Penning prospects that are available out there have been through their basic training to prepare them for Cutting or Cow horse disciplines. If started and trained by qualified people, these horses are easier to continue and set up a program for. Penning is an offensive game in which we have to move the cow up the arena. Therefore horses out of most Cutting programs need to learn a little more 'forward' than they have been allowed to have in their Cutting training. A Penning horse must be equally capable of making defensive moves, but the ability to shift back into offense must be instilled. Horses that have been down the fence lots often need to have more rate programmed into the system. A horse that has been headed off in Team Roping probably with need to learn to go by when asked, rather than rating back at the hip.

Depending on the individual I will adjust my program. For horses with little cow experience, I will take a



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Team Penning Accomplishments

2X CTCPA National Hi Point Champion Truck Winner
1998 CTCPA National Finals Open Class Winner
4X AQHA World Show Qualifier
2001 CTCPA National Finals Hi Point Open Rider
Cheyenne Frontier Days Shoot Out Champion
Cam Clark Super Classic Shoot Out Champion
USTPA Finals Top 10 Open
2002 Denver National Western Champion
2002 Calgary Stampede Champion
2002 Regina Agribition Champion

quiet cow and track it around the arena or pasture. Watching their ears, they will let you know when they are watching cattle better, reacting to the cow's movement. Too cowy? Yes there are some horses out there which we need to school to now cow up quite as much or be so intent in certain situations. Some real cowy horses will key on the first cow that moves. This horse needs to listen to the rider more, staying between the reins and legs. Most great 'Cow horses' can read a cow better than us cowboys ever will, but we can read the #'s on the cows and there are times when it is real important that they listen to the rider first. As much as we need our horses to hook onto a cow, it is equally as important for them to release when asked, much the same as good cow dog listening to it handler.

Lots of trainers & owners in disciplines other than Penning have developed contents with people involved in our sport, enabling them to market their horses that are not working out in their program. More and more of these people are gaining a better understanding of what type of horse is required.

There are still some 'Vultures' out there, so if you are inexperienced, don't be scared to seek the advice of a knowledgeable horseman who understands the penning game.

In my travels doing clinics across the country, the biggest thing I see is too many people competing against the clock. These riders do not take the time to correct their horses during warm-ups or practice sessions, or take advantage of opportunity to work cattle one on one. Often the slowest cow in the herd is the one you can accomplish the most on. Doing things slower and correct will better prepare both you and your horse for your next competition. If things aren't correct at a slow pace they will be much worse the faster we go. Remember there are more horses out there with 'people problems' than there are people with 'horse problems'. The better 'Horsemen' we become, the more our equine partners will serve us.