

Good Cuts Make Good Runs



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Ten Tips to Improve Your Cuts



“Cuts make runs. It’s a domino effect.”

These are the words of Russell McCord, Director of Judges at the National Cutting Horse Association.

Russell’s insights had laser-like clarity about how a judge views runs during a three-day showing clinic. Front views, as well as an elevated, rear video angle provided lots of situations to explain key points.

Much time was spent discussing herdwork because of the potent positive or negative consequences cuts have on a score.

We learned the indisputable power of credit-earning cuts, as well as the undeniable negative consequences of poor cuts.

Here are some of the specifics of our discussions’ highlights so you, too may benefit from the clinic.

On the “Aspire-To-Do” Side:

1. Credit-earning cuts are “free” points. That is, you can enhance your score per cow by executing clean, middle-third-of-the-pen cuts. Add driving-out aggressively, and you have the potential to add several points to your score with precise, clean herdwork. “Free” refers to the fact that this is under your direct control. You can survive or place by “making-up” for poor aspects of your run by adding points with good herdwork.
2. Judges want to see you “come and cut”! This means a judge is trained to reward the rider who is methodical, accurate and walks up with authority. He wants to see you cut clean, out front, and in the middle third of the pen. You can set yourself apart by becoming skilled in clean, aggressive cuts.
3. If you are not yet at the skill level of making aggressive cuts, no problem. Stay focused on being clean and staying in the middle third of the arena for a shape cut. As your skills develop, you can continue to add point value to your runs with more dramatic, higher-degree-of-difficulty cuts.
4. Whether you are cutting for shape, or cutting a specific cow, judges like to see you move forward as you cut. Most credit earning cuts occur in a forward motion.

(A riding topic for another discussion is that while your cut should be moving forward, you should simultaneously feel that your horse is ready to work once you put your hand down. Your horse’s readiness depends on your riding. Ideally, your horse should be cautiously moving forward ready to work a cow powered from his hindquarters.)

On the “To-Avoid” side:

1. You do not want to be stopping and starting your horse in the herd.
2. You do not want to be backing-up during a cut.
3. Left and right motions on a cut are never desirable. Chances are you will make your cut on an outer third of the arena. This is frowned upon. Again, the judge likes forward motion in the middle third of the arena.
4. The judge does not like to see people just hanging out in the herd during a cut.
5. Judges like to see a run build. It is best to start clean and methodical on the first cut. Don’t try to power it out in the beginning and risk setting-up the run so it can’t build from the beginning. You can still make a credit-earning cut on the first cut without going overboard. First impressions are big. Judges pay runs in a “risk and reward”

mindset. It is better for you to take a higher risk if need be later on in your run. Don't put yourself in peril, and make a poor impression unnecessarily right off the bat.

6. Be careful not to pull your horse back right before you put your hand down.

Consistency in your herdwork is built by thinking and acting systematically:

1. Have a plan.
2. Work through your plan with your main helper prior to your ride so everyone is on the same page. This planning can happen before the show, at the show, or right before you ride.
3. Enter the herd with authority and a route in mind.
4. Breathe and use your eyes as you drive a group of cattle to continually scan the ever-changing situation.
5. Think forward and move forward as you set up your cut in the middle third of the arena. Focus on the middle of the arena to avoid suddenly getting the urge to blast off into the outer zones. Train yourself to think, "center, forward, and clean".

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