

When to Quit!



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I'm Not Talking About Quitting Our Sport! I'm Talking About Quitting a Cow!



A big challenge for many cutters is understanding the “whys” of an instruction.

We cutters have a love-hate relationship with the fact that our sport requires moment-to-moment decisions.

It's the nature of our sport. There are no pre-set patterns or courses. We have to make decisions on the spot. We hold the reins.

This makes our sport exciting ... and sometimes frustrating.

One of these crucial decisions during competition is when to quit a cow and go for another.

Here are a few of the things you can weigh when you decide to stay with or quit a cow:

- Is your “good” cow maximized ... that is, did you get all the credit-earning work out of her yet?
 - Is your “mediocre” cow worth staying on?
- Is the cow you cut so “bad”, the only smart thing to do is quit and get another one?

Let's begin with a description of an ideal cow.

It faces your horse and goes back and forth for 15-30 feet at a medium clip in the middle of the arena. It has “feel” which means it stops and goes the other direction when you get into the correct position. The wonder cow never darts toward the turn back people, the herd holders, towards the back fence or ends of the arena.

Okay, with that reference in mind here are the most common cow behaviors that should be red flags for you that it's time to look for a place to quit and get another cow.

This list does not discuss the jillions of situations, that affect your decisions at any moment in time, (like how much time you have been working it, or how much time is left on the clock).

That's a discussion for another day. This list is meant to be a simple set of key indicators about when a cow is probably used-up. Her best stuff is gone ... if she ever had it!

Now, I also understand you have to work a cow until you can quit legally. For the purposes of this discussion, I am assuming you will wait until a legal opportunity is available to you.

With those things understood, here are the red flags:

1. She starts off good, but darts hard towards one of the corners. The key word here is dart. You can bet the next time she comes back in the same direction, she will try even harder to get to the corner. **She's no good. Do your best to stop her and quit working her as soon as possible.**
2. She has no interest in your horse. She wanders from one place to another ... everywhere but in the vicinity of you and your horse. **She may or may not be that “bad”, but without you being able to really affect her behavior and stop her, you won't be able show much of what your horse can do.**
3. She is numb. She stands there and your turn back helpers are yelling and slapping their chaps. She barely moves. **Quit.**
4. She is crazy! Her tail goes up and maybe over her back. She is on a mission to go anywhere at jet speed and get by any horse she can. She might aim at the turn back horses or just run wildly in the arena. **If she is super wild and you keep working her, even if she's not coming in your direction, chances are she's going to**

turn on you sooner or later and mow you over!

5. She starts off like our ideal cow, but then starts moving in any direction out of the middle of the arena sweet spot. **She may not be that bad, but chances are you've gotten all of the good stuff out of her and she's not coming back to stage center.**
6. She starts running from wall-to-wall. **It's time to quit.**
7. She starts trying to get through the turn back helpers. **Thumbs down.**
8. She snorts at you! **Adios, amigos! Quit ASAP.**

A great way to practice is to watch cattle from the bleachers in as many classes as you can and start studying how cattle behave.

When does their behavior change and when would be the most ideal time to quit?

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