

## Alert!!! Potential Cutting Horse Trouble Spot



Written by Cited Author

Friday, 11 February 2011 10:42

Posted By Barbra Schulte On June 4, 2010 (1:44 pm) In [Riding and Showing Elements](#)

### ***Misuse of Your Herd Side Leg***

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Your feet are instrumental in communicating lots of messages to your horse including acceleration, direction on the line, movement of one of the horse's body parts (like a hip), softening a body part (like a stiff rib cage), or asking a horse to look at a cow ... just to name a few.

And to add to your challenge, the correct way to use your feet on any given horse depends on how that horse was trained ... which might be extra confusing.

Proper use of the herd side foot in particular, can be one of the most mysterious skills for you to learn. Timing and pressure/release are critical. Get either, or both, of these things wrong and BIG misunderstood communications can occur for your horse. The results can be just short of disastrous.

Incorrect actions can have serious, negative effects on your horse's performance such as forcing his attention away from the cow or pushing his rib cage toward the cow. Both instances can put him off balance for the turn and/or signal him to run off.

Misuse of a herd side leg, in many situations, boils down to the rider's desire to "make something happen". Sometimes a beginner to intermediate rider doesn't feel comfortable and, for some reason, using that leg in a kick motion seems to be a sure fix.

It's often counter intuitive to just wait and let things happen.

So here's some solutions to help develop the accurate use of your herd side foot:

1. Ask your trainer exactly how and when he wants you to use your herd side foot. Choose a time when it's not super busy and there is an appropriate time for him to explain the answer.

This understanding is imperative to getting the rhythm and technique of using your herd side foot in the way your horse was trained.

2. Watch your trainer and other trainers from behind the herd when the situation allows it. For example, watching from above at Will Rogers Coliseum in Fort Worth during an Open Division class is a fantastic way to study how professionals use their herd side foot.

3. Strive to stay calm so you can develop rhythm, "feel", and patience with the cow and with your horse. Only when you are calm and connected to the cow and your horse can you use your feet appropriately. Talk to yourself. Tell yourself to "Breathe. StayCool".

This calmness skill will also help you stay mentally and emotionally cool when things seem precarious or vulnerable, i.e., when you are unsure if your horse will come out of the corner with the cow or if your horse

feels delayed in a turn (“hanging”). When you stay calm in those situations, you have the best chance of responding appropriately.

4. Practice the correct use of your herd side foot on the flag. Ask your trainer to stand behind you and give you specific feedback regarding this one aspect. Break down your practice so you can focus on this specific skill.

5. Keep your eyes softly focused on the cow at all times. As you combine staying relaxed with watching the cow, you will give yourself the best opportunity to respond well to any situation.

For some reason, when your eyes go off the cow, your feet more naturally sprout their own wings – especially when the cow is fast! Keep your eyes on the cow!

As you learn to ride your cutting horse with the accurate use of your feet in general, and your herd side foot specifically, you will begin riding better and communicating well with your horse.

Article taken from Personal Performance Coach for all riders | Cutting Horse Trainer and Educator | Author, Speaker, Clinician - <http://barbraschulte.com>

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Last Updated on Friday, 11 February 2011 10:45