



Managing the Caviada: *The Good cowboss makes his mark*

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One of the greatest qualities that ranch life has to offer is its illusion of timelessness. Seasons come and go through the years and the ranch continues on, each season a repeat of the last. A person can lose themselves in the cycle of never-ending comings and goings. It is difficult to recognize changes in the world around the ranch, with so much energy going into the work involved. Yet change comes all the same. It is the management's job to look up from their daily tasks and read the shifts in supply and demand, taking note of viable trends and new directions.

The cow business is what is known as a "mature" business. The price of a cow has not drastically changed, on average, in the last 15 years. In 1978 a good cow/calf pair ran between \$500 and \$800 depending on the feed, region and quirky market ripples. A new pickup ran about \$10,000, and \$1500 to \$1800 bought a pretty nice horse. Today, a new pickup runs around \$35,000 (about a 250% increase) and the same quality of horse runs about \$5000 (a 200% increase) but the pairs still come in about the same value, a steady \$500-\$800. Ranches are becoming increasingly aware of the poten-

tial value of their horses. A horse that has completed his usefulness on the ranch may be worth a considerable sum of money on the outside market. More and more ranches are going into the business of raising and making nice horses as a means to offset the traditionally limited beef market.

The "caviada," or "cavvy" is a Spanish term for the saddle horses used in the daily workings on the ranch. Ranches have gradually recognized the growing value of a good cavvy, and the better operators strive to improve and protect this valuable investment. They have found that the best way to do so lies in the man hired as the liaison between the management, the crew, the horses and the cows—the cowboss.

COWBOSS SAVVY

Good management appreciates the contribution a good cowboss makes to the cavvy. They take the time to find the right man for the job and understand what he needs to know to keep the ranch running smoothly while still building value into the ever-increasing financial interest the cavvy claims.

A cowboss that knows the country, its climate and yield, as well as the ranch itself, is invaluable. He needs to know the horses in the cavvy, their traits and quirks, their level of training and mannerisms. He needs to have the knowledge and power to hire the best help and then be able to understand and appreciate their abilities and qualifications.

The cowboss uses all of this knowledge daily as he makes decisions and tries to protect the interests of both the ranch and the crew. A good cowboss and a good cavvy will not only attract the best of hands but will more likely keep them. A great deal of seemingly tiny daily decisions achieve this end.

THE STRING

The cowboss assembles each string of horses (a group of 6-10 horses assigned to a buckaroo for his use and care) with much thought and deliberation. A string must be balanced, in that, there are different kinds of horses





Honoring Tradition

available for different situations. There should be some seasoned horses; some physically tough horses for rougher country; some young, long-strided horses to cover the ground on bigger days; green colts just entering their useful years; etc. A balanced combination of talent makes up a balanced string.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

Buckaroos should manage their string according to the day's work. They can only do this with the help of the cowboss. A cowboss who is mindful of the maintenance and quality of the cavvy gives the cowboy a general idea of the kind of day ahead of him.

He can make mention of this as cowboys catch horses for the day's work. He might call for cowboys to catch "a circle horse" for the long days spent outside making a big gather. Cowboys will catch a strong-winded horse in the prime of life for this task. The circle horse need not be as agile or finely trained. He will have a "big motor" with lots of energy and endurance. If the cowboss calls for his crew to catch a "lass horse," cowboys know that there is probably a good deal of roping ahead of them and will select a mount accordingly. If an "inside" day is on the agenda, cowboys will choose older, more finely trained mounts for the intricate workings in a corral or rodear ground.

A little bit of forethought on the part of the cowboss will greatly improve the quality of the cavvy and the crew. Horses that are mismatched to the day's work quickly become a liability instead of an asset. Young soft colts or aged "inside" horses may give out and become numb on a big circle. Green colts used "inside" on a faster-paced, high-pressure day might grow equally dull from "too much too soon." Big-strided, less responsive horses are equally frustrating to the buckaroo working the alley or trying to sort flighty, agile calves.

A crew can use this knowledge not only to select an ideal

mount for the day but may also work in a balanced fashion with their fellow crew members. A buckaroo with a difficult colt to ride may arrange to balance his inefficiency by asking another crew member to take a more solid animal on the trip. The crew can trade off in this fashion as the days progress, making sure that all the horses get used to the best of their ability while still ensuring that the day's work gets done.

Understanding the qualities each horse has to offer and trying to place the horse in the correct environment improves the quality of life for both horse and cowboy. Horses will steadily improve over time, increasing their value and making their use more and more enjoyable for the buckaroo who rides them.

MATCH MAKER

Not only must the cowboss match horses to the job, but he must match each cowboy's abilities and personality to his string. Matching horses to cowboys is a delicate business. Strings must be assembled that are balanced and efficient. One string should not have all of the nice horses, leaving only the difficult mounts in another.

Younger greener hands will be given a mixture of horses in line with their qualifications. A finely tuned, seasoned bridle horse of supreme sensitivity should not be wasted on a green cowboy that is unlikely to notice or appreciate the finer qualities of the mount. He may, in his ignorance, reverse valuable training or dull the animal. An older, more experienced hand would maintain the horse's level of training and hopefully improve it. Gradually, as a green cowboy's skills improve, a cowboss will reward a hardworking eager youth with better and better mounts.

A cowboss who remains sensitive to the needs of his charges is a valuable commodity. He must notice subtle improvements and make mention of them when appropriate.



All souls appreciate encouragement. A cowboss who takes the time to give credit where credit is due will find himself respected and highly regarded. He rewards a crew by not only mentioning the good, but noticing the bad. It is his responsibility to protect the integrity of the crew by culling inferior horses and cowboys. A good crew will thank the man who is not afraid to send a bad one down the road.



MAKING A CHANGE

Just as the cowboss can reward good behavior and competence, he also reserves the right to “pull” horses from a buckaroo’s string if he feels that cowboy is not managing his horses as he should. A cowboss may pull horses out of a string if the cowboy fails to ride a horse regularly, or conversely, rides one horse too much. He might pull a horse if the cowboy is not advancing the horse’s training or if his practices are causing the horse’s training to decline. Sometimes a simple “personality conflict” justifies a change if a cowboy’s temperament is not complementary to the temperament of a particular horse.

A cowboy reserves the right to “turn a horse in” (that is, reject a horse that has been cut to him) only when he has good reason to. Cowboys must exhaust all means they have for dealing with a particular mount before they consider turning one in.

All horsemen are aware of the fact that difficult horses often foster innovation and learning in our attempt to meet the challenge. A cowboss must be aware of this fact as well and walk the line. He needs to know when to encourage a cowboy to triumph over adversity or when to cut his losses and move on.

A buckaroo should be conservative when it comes to turning a horse in. Cowboys who turn too many horses in run the risk of being considered poor hands, or incapable. Knowing this, it is a right only exercised as a last resort.

When cowboys or horses consistently fail to make the grade, they must be let go. When this happens, a good cowboss will try to maintain the string left behind so that he has a decent string to offer a potential replacement. Good horses bring good cowboys. Good cowboys make the ranch money with their competence and experience, both with the cattle and the cavvy.

GENETICS

Some ranches keep mares and raise their own replacement mounts. For many years ranches focused on the genetics in their cows and ignored the same principles in their horse herds.

The horses of today have never been more trainable.

Ranches that tap into these superior genetics have benefited on the ranch and in the sale ring. Many ranches have started horse programs that use the horses they raise for their work on the ranch and then market those horses to the general public when they are ready.

Few things can balance and gentle a horse like the ever-changing situations presented to him on the ranches. Roping and brandings, difficult terrain, water crossings, hauling, long hours and many miles all contribute to a horse’s experience. Experienced horses are versatile and can handle many different disciplines with ease. They often make prime mounts for those looking for a horse to use and enjoy.

The beauty of ranch horse programs is that, due to the terrain and distances involved, horses must not only be trainable but they must stay sound. Conformation that promotes soundness is an important part of the cavvy. The ranch provides a method of measure on issues of soundness. Horses need to be able to hold up under certain taxing conditions.

Sadly, many show horse breeders fail to accept the responsibility of breeding for soundness. It is a moral issue. Horses that are brought into the world with feet and legs able to go the distance are more likely to have productive, useful lives, free from pain and suffering. Ranches that breed horses for the caviada must take soundness conformation into consideration.

As the cowboss and his crew work to make nice horses and care for the cattle, their feedback influences the breeding program. There is a great advantage to using the horses being produced. The management can make adjustments in their breeding program quickly and so raise the quality of the cavvy and the potential revenue they may generate.

Buckaroos who have the privilege to ride for an outfit that manages a fine cavvy will spread the word to equally qualified hands, and the ranch will always enjoy a large workforce from which to draw. Good help that stays is an asset to the ranch. As fields and allotments are learned and practices honed, the ranch’s efficiency will increase, and daily tasks will run smoother.

The cowboss can make a tremendous difference in the overall quality and worth of a ranch when supported in his decisions and given the latitude he needs to improve the crew and the cavvy. The effort that goes into such an endeavor is truly a worthy cause both financially and ethically.