



Penning's fast-paced competition moves begin with slow and steady techniques at home.

1 APPROACHING THE HERD

Slowly walk towards the herd in a straight line. Continue walking through the herd – keep your horse moving. Let him smell, bump and gently push the cattle. As he gets more comfortable, begin directing him in lines, through the cattle. (This is just to get him comfortable with the cattle, nothing else). Then exit the herd, slowly and quietly. If your horse rushes, immediately stop him, back him up a couple of steps and re-enter the herd. As he gets less and less rushed, his lines of walking through the cattle should get longer. After doing this about 20 times or more you should feel that your horse's lines have gotten straighter, and correspondingly, his confidence and comfort level have also increased.



The approach to the herd should be quiet and controlled.

TO THE PEN

LESSON 1: CUTTING A COW FROM THE HERD

THESE ARE ACTUAL LESSONS FROM DONNA O'REILLY'S TEAM PENNING CLINICS DESIGNED TO TAKE YOU FROM THE PRACTICE PEN TO THE ARENA OVER THE COURSE OF THIS FOUR PART SERIES

~ By Donna O'Reilly, with Darla Rathwell
Photos by Miles Wright

In this series of team penning lessons I hope to teach you techniques you can use to build a solid training program, whether with a young horse or seasoned penning horse. I will also give you an idea of your horse's thought process in different situations. The lessons will give a beginner penner a head

start before going out to the arena, and the seasoned penner a solid program to come back to after competition.

The first exercise in this lesson involves letting your horse become comfortable with a herd of cattle, a technique we call shedding. Shedding includes the approach to the herd, lifting the herd (which is the first contact you make with the cattle), and the splitting of the herd into two or more sets. All parts of the exercise should be started at a walk and then slowly increased to a faster pace. Remember, before beginning, ensure you have a safe work area for both you and your horse. Introducing a young horse to herd work can be a run of emotions, it is a good idea to use a small quiet group of no more than 10 cows. All parts of the exercise should be started at a walk. Then slowly increase to a faster pace, building your horse's confidence before moving on. You will need to keep your cues concise and consistent so your horse is clear on what you're asking of him.

2 THE LIFT AND SHED

The object here is to ride your horse straight into the herd, causing the cattle to split into two small groups. This separation of the cows is confusing to most horses and they want to shift in the opposite direction of the cattle's movement. Keep your reins short, and steady him with calm words, then continue pushing through the herd. Don't stop at any point during the lift. Keep him moving forward – you want him to learn how to totally lift those cows. Once the cattle are split into two groups it's your horse's job to keep the "shed," or separation, between the two herds. While the two herds are apart, allow him to stand in the middle, pat him and let him relax. After a short while continue with walking forward, stopping, backing up, do a rollback and then once again, let him stand and relax. It's time now to face the cattle you have shed. You are going to ask your horse to side-pass with a cow, anyone will do just fine for this step. We are still working on keeping the two herds of cattle apart. If for any reason the two herds join back together, start over again with step one (the approach), and continue on to step two (lifting and splitting). With a young horse I would finish the lesson at this point. Ending on a good note will build a stronger foundation in your horse's penning training.



The split nearly accomplished.



The "shedding" of the herd is accomplished slowly in the training stage, and evolves to a quicker pace in competition.

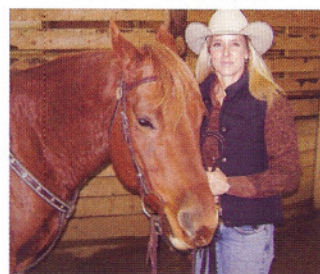


The sort demonstrated during a competition.

3 THE SORT

When you feel your horse is ready to move on, you will start the sorting by turning him toward one of the herds. Don't let your horse choose a cow. You are going to keep him moving back and forth, face to face with your herd. Keep your eyes on the slowest moving cow; this will be the one you cut from the herd. Remember sorting is about lateral movements with your cow, blocking the cow from moving. Take one step at a time toward the cow, then lateral movements with your cow. Your horse will have the urge to move with the other cows that are moving, remain focused on just this one cow. Don't let your horse's nose off this cow, even if it runs across the herd, keep it isolated. Now using your horse's nose, turn the cow's head away from the herd. Once he gives up trying to get back to the herd, quit working the cow. Accomplish this by softly asking your horse; pull up on your reins, and press your free hand fingers into his neck just in front of the saddle. This will be the cue that tells him his job is done. Finally, turn your horse around and face the herd once again. This will teach him to wait for his next job.

These lessons need to be repeated at least twice a week, with an unfinished horse, and at least once a week with a finished horse. After a competition, I always bring my horses back to this program and make sure everything is still programmed the way I like it. Sometimes the pressure of a fast paced show, tough cattle, and bad rider judgment, may undo the horse's foundation. Slow things down and build his confidence back up, get him back listening and wanting to be bitable and soft. When I actually start penning, I follow the same steps to cutting my cow out of the herd as I've practiced in my lesson. Keep practicing the steps, without forcing it, and you will get faster and faster. Just remember – slow and simple is how you build on becoming fast. **WHR**



DONNA O'REILLY

Donna lives on a ranch near Millarville, Alberta, with her husband and two daughters. She has been coaching, teaching lessons and conducting clinics for the past 20 years. She actively competes in team penning and working cow horse events. Some of her most recent accomplishments are winning the Cherokee Shoot-Out at this year's Zender Fall Classic, 2007 ARCHA Canadian Snaffle Bit Intermediate Cow Horse Champion, 2008 Super Stakes Reserve Cow Horse Champion, 2008 Canadian Supreme Hackamore Finalist and Money Earner, 2008 Dave Fraser Penning Series Open Champion, 2008 Chinook Team Penning Association Champion, 2008 Fall Showdown Rodeo Penning Champion.

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Thanks to the members of the Central Alberta Team Penning Association who helped illustrate the techniques discussed in this article.

For rules and regulations on team penning go to Canadian Team Penning Association website: www.canadianpenning.com