

ANOTHER APPROACH

Ranch Roping

By Joe Wolter

Be smooth when you rope.

In the last issue we talked about roping off a young horse, and I want to carry that a bit further. In particular, I want to talk about the importance of being smooth when you rope.

When I'm doing clinics around the country, I talk a lot about smoothness with your roping and I can't stress that enough. Everyone wants to be fast, but smooth is more important than fast. As a matter of fact, you can't really be fast without being smooth. However, if you are smooth, you will be fast. Plus, if you kind of keep things even and gradual and slow, you will notice that neither your horse nor your cattle will become jerky and frantic.

I've had some experience in doing things frantic, but it was from not knowing. The same with my horse, he got frantic because he didn't know any other way. I mentioned this in the last issue, but I have had horses that the first time I roped on them I dallied a little too quick -- had to hurry to the saddle horn -- and I was kind of frantic doing it. That horse felt that in me, and he remembered it the next time.

I've roped cattle off a young horse from one side or the other, and had to hurry to dally, and my horse has gotten a tug sideways. It scared him. They don't readily forget things like that. They remember what happened just before whatever happened that scared them. If you're not careful, you can put something in there that will take a long time -- if ever -- to get out.

A horse isn't very strong when pulling from the side, so when I've roped one from the side, I'll let my dallies run while I turn. I'll either maneuver his hindquarters around so that the pull is from the front, or turn so that the calf comes around behind the horse. When the calf is straight with the horse, I'll stop the running on the saddle horn. Be smooth, gradual and slow. Let those dallies slip, and bring your calf to a gradual stop so you don't get that sudden jerk.

Also, after you rope and before you dally, take the slack out of your rope and dally on a tight rope. That way there's no sudden jerk. You have more of a gradual pull.

When I first start roping off a colt, I try to keep as quiet and smooth as possible. I don't try to make hard throws; I wait for the cattle. I want my horse lined up, going the same direction the calf is, and I am going to throw at the calf when I know where it's going. I fix it so that the calf runs into my loop. I make it so that my horse's feet are all shaped up and he's standing somewhat square when I dally. Then he's prepared for that tug when it comes.

Finally, if I've got a young horse, I want to quit when he's a winner. I want to quit before he gets tired. If you finish up with a horse in a good attitude, relaxed, the next time you go rope on him, it's likely to be as though he's been roped on a bunch.

Four Sixes Ranch trainer Joe Wolter has had a column in each issue of America's Horse since its inception. His video "There's Roping To Do" is available at Quarter Horse Outfitters by calling 1-888-209-8322.