

It's a known fact that some bugs and several spiders have a bite that has a very profound effect on your life. For instance, the brown recluse and the black widow are just a couple that cause great discomfort for quite awhile. But nothing can change your life like the "cutting bug". This particular little bug bit me in 1964 and completely consumed and changed my life forever. It gave me the passion and desire to develop and create who I am today in the cutting world. I owe it all to this little guy.

So, if you've been bitten, you want to get involved, and you want to buy a horse, I will be sharing some information and guidelines to help you purchase your new partner and get you started on your new adventure. I'll be attempting to start you off in the right direction as much as possible, with the hope that your experience will be a very positive one. My goal is to draw new people into the cutting world, and keep them coming back for more.

First, let's set some realistic goals for you and your new partner. What is your general knowledge of horses? What about your horsemanship, riding experience and the knowledge of the sport you want to participate in? This information will help determine what kind of horse you need to start your journey. How old of a horse do you need, and what requirements does he/she need to have for your level of knowledge and horsemanship in order to help you? Is this the kind of horse that will fit your riding ability and your personality? Also, very important to know: your ideal horse **must be sound and healthy** to insure success in your new partnership.

As my dear friend Jimmy Bush would say, you'll need to give these things some "mature thought" as well. Do you know how much money you can *really* afford to spend on purchasing your horse? Do you know what the cost is to maintain this horse in a winning fashion? How much can you afford to spend on *your own* training so you can accomplish your goals together? Remember, a good horse is only as good as it's rider. A horse will seek it's rider's level of competency eventually, without fail. Your horsemanship skills are essential to your success. Make no mistake, there's a reason horses come apart over time. You don't need to help accelerate that process. I guarantee you, it is absolutely possible to enjoy years of success with the same horse, *if* you invest in yourself as well. Once you understand that the main difference between you and the riders who are winning consistly, is their horsemanship level, you're on your way.

It's vitally important that you find someone you can trust with the right amount of experience and knowledge to help you in finding and selecting the right horse for the job. If you want to buy a cutting horse, don't ask a reiner for advice.

OK, you've found a horse to try out. Just remember, this is not the only horse in the country for sale. Impulse shopping is out. This is the time to listen to your coach, but this is also the time to listen to your heart. Do not be a reflex buyer, this horse has to fit you NOW – not a year from now. You are the one who has to live with and pay for this decision, not your coach or the seller. Listen to your heart. If you think this horse is unattractive, too wide, too tall, too short, or you really don't like him as an individual, (and YES that matters), you won't like him any better later on. If you don't like your horse, he'll know that and it will affect his performance. When you need him the most, he will probably choose that time to repay your kindness, and it won't be a good deal. All too often I have witnessed top riders on horses they clearly dislike, and rarely have those horses missed an opportunity to let them down at a crucial moment.

The fit is perfect, you like everything about your new mount, looks great, rides great, passed all the tests. Now it's time for the prepurchase exam. Please do yourself a favor and find an excellent vet. You are under NO obligation to use the seller's recommendation. Find a vet that's working for you. This is not a witch hunt, but you do need to know as much as possible about this horse before you write that check. Most horses are going to require some maintenance. The question is how much? My main concerns are the legs and feet. No wheels, no performance. Hocks, stifles, teeth, eyes, heart, lungs all need a good look. Always a good idea to test for drugs that may have been administered to hide a problem (tranquilizers, pain killers). A current coggins won't hurt either, you'll need it anyway.

I personally love pretty horses with good breeding and kind temperaments but they also have to love their job and want to perform. In 1973, the Doc Bar ranch in CA had a 2 yo sorrel filly by the great Doc Bar and out of a direct daughter of Leo. Charlie and Stephanie Ward wanted to prove this new cross and asked Don Dodge to develop and show her at the Futurity. Don took one look and said he wouldn't waste his time putting her on cattle because her back legs were too straight and that she could never stop. Charlie then offered the filly to me. I rode

her, liked her and took her home. My friend Chester Dennis fell in love with her and bought her immediately from me. In 1974 at the NCHA Futurity in Ft. Worth, Doc's Yuba Lea was the Open Futurity Champion. I forgot to tell her she couldn't stop!

Development through trust and confidence, can overcome a lot of obstacles in people and horses. The night of the finals in Ft. Worth, I asked for her heart, and she gave it to me.

Until next time, cut clean, quit clean and have fun in middle!

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