

Cow Horse Crash Course Guide

Safety

1. NEVER have the cow crossing directly in front of your horse in such a way that they could become tangled or your horse can get tripped up. It's a good way to get in a big wreck.
2. WATCH THAT COW. Worry about the where the cow is. If you aren't watching the cow and your horse is, you could end up in the dirt. You'll be going right, cow goes left so your horse goes left and you're still going right if you aren't watching that cow.

The object of the game: Control

Reined Cow Horse is about control. Control the cow, don't chase the cow! It can be slow or fast, because you are in control, based on your position on the cow. If you end up chasing the cow, pull off and start over, you'll never catch him.

The Bubble

Every cow has a bubble. Think of it as a sphere of influence. It's like an invisible buffer zone that each cow has that determines how close he'll let you get. A quiet cow will have a bubble that is only a few feet off its body and it may take you coming within 10 feet of it to get the cow to move. Some cows will start moving when you are within 50 feet or more. BIG bubble. Proceed with caution on these – things change fast.



← Bubble →



Position 101

Driving

A position at the cow's hip, behind the shoulder, will drive the cow forward. The distance between you and the cow affects the speed. The closer to the cow, the faster you will go. A cow's bubble will determine how close you can get to adjust your speed. Note that the horse is not behind the cow. You should never have daylight between your horse's head and the cow's rear. (see chasing)



Or you can even move your horse off the cow laterally to slow it further →



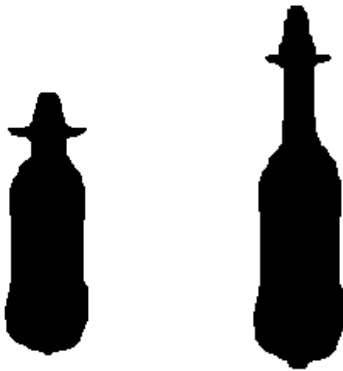
← Moving in on the cow will cause him to speed up. Note that the horse is still on the cow's hip, behind its head.

Stopping the cow

Once you decide to stop the cow, simply step to its head. It should stop and turn. Watch the cow! Don't anticipate that its going to stop, don't stop and turn your horse until that cow stops and turns. One of the biggest mistakes people make starting off is turning into the cows shoulder – horse stops and starts to turn and that cow just keeps going straight. Get all the way to the head and don't stop until that cow stops. Always turn INTO the cow. If you turn away, that is a Turn Tail and an automatic ZERO.

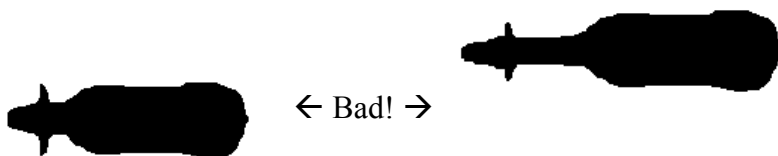
STOP! Before you turn

The best way to get beat is to forget your stop. Stop your horse before you turn on the cow. If you don't, you'll end up doing a barrel turn and end up behind the cow.



Chasing (out of position!)

If you find yourself chasing the cow, pull off laterally to slow the cow down, get back into position (laterally) and then gradually move back into the cow. You are not in control of the run if you are chasing the cow. You should never have daylight between you and your cow.



Getting back to position:



Move your horse out to slow the cow. ↑



Then move up:



Then finally move back into position



Cow Side Leg

You'll hear "cow side leg!" yelled at these events. You use your cow side leg to keep your horse from leaning on the cow. So if the cow is on your right, use your right leg when driving that cow. If your horse leans on the cow, the cow will feel pressured and will tend to "squirt" out in front of you when you go to turn. If your horse leans on the cow in the herd work, you will most likely get "spun out" and lose a cow back into the herd.

Reading cattle

There is no substitute for just spending hours watching cattle react to horses. When you are at a show, watch as many runs as you can. Don't just watch the horse, watch how the cattle react to the horse. You should also try to work cattle on foot – it's a great way to learn. Here's a few helpful hints. Not all cattle are the same, so these aren't set in stone. Remember, you are working the cow, the cow isn't working you, so step up and make things happen.

As you approach the cow, make sure he sees you before you start working. Make some noise if you have to.

A good cow will make eye contact, wait for you to hit it's "bubble" and it will move away from you. Once you get to the head, it will stop. It will want to turn and face you and look at you – that is a good cow.

Watch out for the ones that try desperately to leave or ignore you; once they see you, they may run for the hills. Give these guys lots of room at first until they see you. Once they do, be ready to go. You might have to get a lot closer than you think to get it to go where you want.

High headed and high tailed – these will run, run, run. Step up and be ready to go. Stay in position, you might have to be 50' from the cow to work it, but stay in position.