

June 2008 Beyond the Basics

Riding Outside the Box – Part III of series

Coming from a ranching background and growing up in eastern Oregon, I didn't always realize how lucky I was to have mountains to ride in, cows to chase, and the total blessing of having a horse with which to share these adventures. For me riding was always 'outside the box' and unbelievably, I never set foot inside an arena until I was nearly 30 years old! I had the good fortune to experience how the environment, especially working with cattle, can set things up for a great partnership with your horse. In Part III of this series of articles which encourage you to get out of the arena and stretch the boundaries of the experiences between you and your horse, let's look at some exercises that will prepare you to read livestock, both horses and cattle. Ultimately, you will be setting things up so that your horse looks forward to the maneuvers that influence the movement of the cattle and give purpose to the exercises you have been practicing. Half-pass, leg-yield, turn on the haunches become necessities to get a job done and soon both you and your horse look forward to the work.

Learning to read cattle so that you could position your horse to influence their movement is pretty basic knowledge on any working ranch. Nevertheless, it amazes me how many times I have seen people forget their horsemanship principles when it comes to working livestock. All of a sudden, time is very

important and everything needs to be done NOW! Pressure and then push harder, until they go through the gate or down the chute is unfortunately a fairly common practice at a number of ranches.

Going Long or Drive & Draw

Working livestock from atop your horse is truly about learning to read eyes & ears, then being strategically geometric! Key components include keeping your horse shaped around the livestock (i.e. looking at it!); Projecting your focus and energy well ahead of the livestock's face; ***Going slow and not getting too close!*** When 'Going Long' you may need to leg-yield your horse away and forward in order to find that imaginary energy line that dissects the line-of-sight on the outside eye of the livestock.



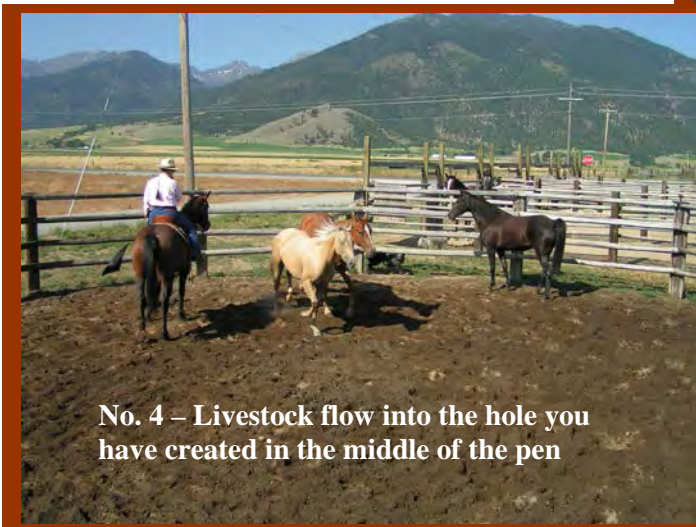
No. 1 - Drive



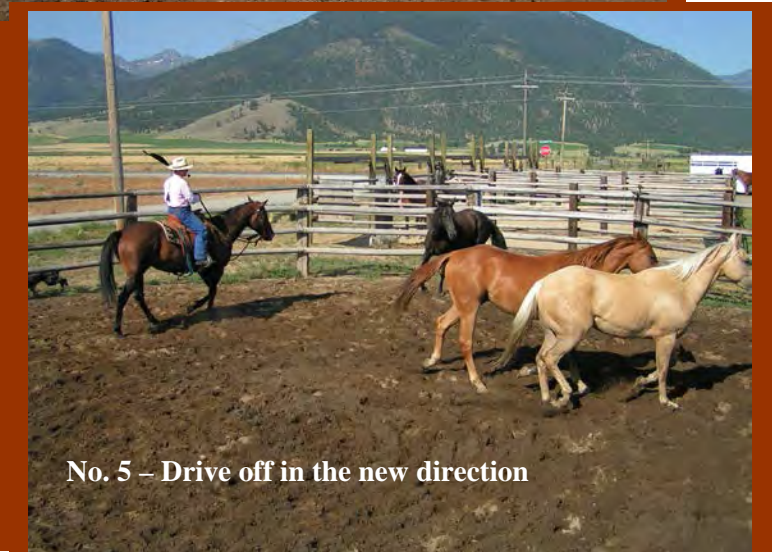
No. 2 – Change bend-Go Long



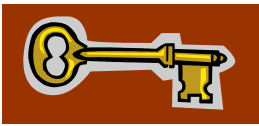
No. 3 – Catch outside eye of the livestock



No. 4 – Livestock flow into the hole you have created in the middle of the pen



No. 5 – Drive off in the new direction



There are several key components to working livestock from atop your horse that are universal in helping you get the job done with no dust, while applying good horsemanship principles:

Slow and Right will Triumph: You have heard the saying, “Slow and right will beat fast and wrong every time”! Nothing could be more true than working with horses to influence livestock. Go slowly, set things up using your ‘Horseman’s Protocol’, and have patience. I guarantee that if you follow these principles, your horse will quickly learn his job, start having fun, and pretty soon you will be going slow so that your horse can speed up!

Eyes and Ears...Influence Feet and Mind: In laying the foundation with your horse during many articles over the past years, we talked about how influencing the eyes and ears of the horse would ultimately connect to the feet, body, and mind. This again is so true when working with cattle. If you want to have them change direction, move forward, back, or sideways you must first get the cow’s attention...Her eyes and ears. If you want them to go through a gate, you must set it up so they see the opening, not just try to pressure them through it.

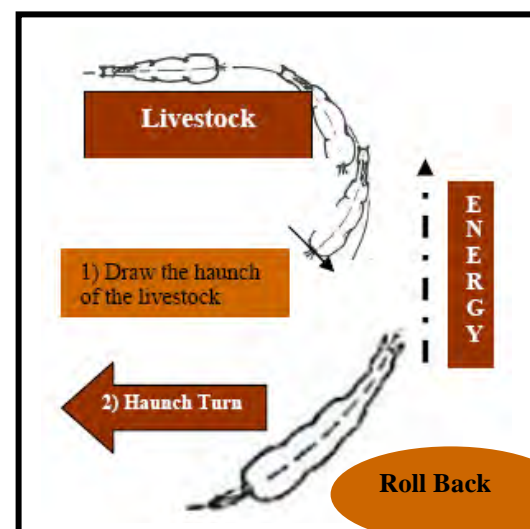
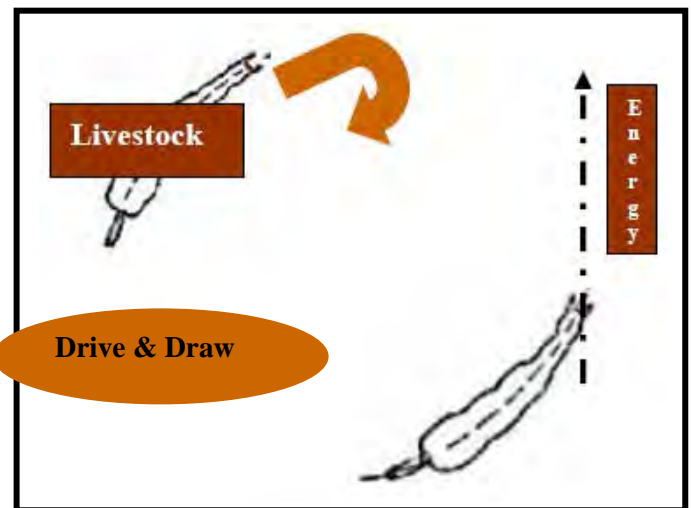
Dressage Patterns and Working Cows...It is VERY Geometric: Here is where the ‘Focus’ portion of your ‘Horseman’s Protocol’ becomes so important. It is critical that you have a clear picture of what you want the cow to do, and recognize that you can project that energy on geometric lines. If I want to catch the outside eye of the cow, I need to project my energy far enough ahead of the movement of the cow, and on a slight arch, that will ultimately influence the outside of the cow. Should I project that energy short, and it hits the shoulder of the cow, she will turn away. Cows have a HUGE bubble and are very aware!

Keep It SIMPLE and Don’t Forget to Reward: There is nothing really complicated about the basic moves you and your horse will need to influence livestock, but that doesn’t mean it is EASY! Take your time, breathe, focus with a clear picture, and remember to reward your horse. If you get in too close and the cow gets past you, don’t punish the horse for your lack of geometric skills!

With these thoughts in mind, let’s look at two patterns you will use to influence livestock from atop your horse: The Drive & Draw (or Going Long) and the Draw & Drive (or Roll Back).

Drive & Draw – You have most likely been using this geometry for years in the round pen with your horses. The idea is to put a little drive or bump on the livestock and then move to a position where you can draw on the eyes and eventually change the direction the cow is traveling. Picture a round pen where the livestock is traveling to the right. I will see in my mind’s eye a change of direction through the middle of the pen. Somehow, I have to get a little flow in the movement of the livestock – that is the drive or bump portion. Next, I have to focus ahead of that movement to a place that dissects their line of travel, while also creating an open space for them to flow into the middle of the pen – that’s the draw! Here is where you get to use many of the skills you have been practicing with your horse. As you drive the livestock around the pen to the right, your horse will be shaped around your right leg. As you envision the ‘draw’, you need to change the bend to the left, leg-yield forward and away for the livestock, creating a hole for the cow to come to, in the middle of the pen. Your energy is projecting far ahead to create a wall that will catch the livestock’s outside/left eye, and influence him to see the hole to run through. As the cow passes through the middle of pen, you are in perfect shape for a turn-on-the-haunch to left, and ready to start the ‘drive’ portion all over again!

Roll Back – This is another maneuver that you have been practicing with your horse, and now you have the opportunity to apply the movement to livestock. The simple picture is to influence the cow to turn away from you and change direction by rolling back towards the fence. However, when performed slowly and with finesse, there are a number of critical positioning components to this exercise.



Start again with a little bump of energy behind the cow to get her traveling to the right around the pen. Next, change the bend in your horse, and leg-yield forward towards the center of the pen. Picture that you have a string on the hindquarters of the cow and you are trying to draw them to you. As soon as those hindquarters break loose, you should be in perfect position to close the energy door on the cow's right eye, causing her to look to her left towards the fence. As she rolls-back, take a half-halt or little pause, then you are set to drive her off the opposite direction – in this case to the left. The key to finesse in the Roll Back is positioning, slow timing, and not blocking the eye, but drawing the hip.

Roll Back or Draw & Drive

In the 'Roll Back' you are trying to influence the eyes to move away from you. Again, keep your horse shaped around the livestock, but you may have to get a little closer and ahead of the livestock to get his eyes to look away. Here is where you can use either a leg-yield to draw the cow's hip to you, or a half-pass to move closer to put pressure on the inside eye and shoulder of the livestock. When you see the butt of the livestock, you are set-up for a great turn-on-the-haunch with your horse. Very Fun!



No. 1 – Rosalie is leg yielding to her right, off her left leg, to draw the hip of the cow towards her. Next she will apply a little pressure to the right eye of the cow.



No. 2 – She has the hip of the cow, and the eyes are looking back to the left. Now, with a little half-halt & patience from Rosalie, the cow will make the right choice!

Games to Play to Prepare for Cattle Work – There are a number of games to play that will prepare both you and your horse for working with real live cattle:

- Ride Your Two-leg Horse
- Round Pen Work at Liberty
- Horse / Human Play
- Two Horses – Mirror Game

Working with cows is a great way to put the “FUN” back into your riding! It will help give very practical applications to the exercises you have been practicing in the arena, and definitely get both you and your horse to thinking and working...Outside the Box!

Things We Do in Clinics:

- Following Cows - Herding - Cutting - Roping
- Column of Two's Herd Work
- Arena Games – Alley Work – Thru Gates - Sorting
- Big Work in Field to Create a Rodear