



Low-Stress Cattle Handling

by **Troy Smith**

***Stockmen offer tips
for how to work
cattle on horseback
and with stockdogs.***

DENVER, CO (Feb. 1, 2006) — Beef producers attending the 2006 Cattlemen's College viewed two live demonstrations of low-stress cattle handling, utilizing common stockmen's tools. Montana rancher and horsemanship clinician Curt Pate offered tips for working cattle from horseback, while Kansas cattleman Charlie Trayer showed how a lone rider can work cattle gently with the help of well-trained stockdogs.

Both animal experts demonstrated the use of techniques to keep cattle calm and minimize stress that can jeopardize cattle health and performance.

Utilizing horses

"Some people are better off working from the back of a horse and some aren't," Pate admitted.

Particularly when working cattle in open country, however, he said he believes riders have an advantage. Riders are able to see all of the cattle being worked, and they have the ability to move smoothly to more favorable positions. They can see where they need to be and get there easily, provided they have adequate horsemanship skills and are suitably mounted.

"It's always going to work better

if they have a horse that can relax when needed, but still be ready to move forward, backward or to the side — a horse that can settle and be quiet, instead of jiggling along and disturbing the cattle."

According to Pate, no-fuss cattle handling requires an understanding of a cow's breaking point — an invisible spot behind its shoulder. When a rider approaches the cow in front of that point, the animal stops or turns back. Approaching to the rear of the breaking point causes the cow to move forward. Successful handling comes when a rider knows how to position the horse with respect to the breaking point to prompt a desired response from the cow.

Similarly, a herd of cattle has a breaking point near the middle of the group. By working in front of the herd's breaking point, or behind it, a rider can direct the movement of the entire group.

Pate warned against riding directly behind cattle if the rider wants to maintain the ability to control direction and speed of movement. Instead, he recommended working slightly to the side and approaching at a flat angle when pressure is needed to maintain motion.

Doggone easy

Charlie Trayer is an accomplished horseman, too, but is best known for raising, training and using stockdogs. Mounted on a horse and using three experienced dogs, Trayer demonstrated how to move cattle quietly, pen them in a corral, and load several head into a trailer. The latter feat was accomplished while the trailer was parked along a fence and without the benefit of a loading alley or any

type of additional help.

Trayer says even cows with calves at side can be handled effectively with dogs. Ideally cows should be “dog-broke” while they are dry, so they will be accustomed to being worked with dogs by the time they have calves. He also stresses the importance of using well-trained dogs and not pups or dogs with too little experience for the job at hand.



Editor's Note: This article was written under contract or by staff of Angus Productions Inc. (API), which claims copyright to this material. It may not be published or distributed without the express permission of Angus Productions Inc. (API). To request reprint permission and guidelines, contact Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, at (816) 383-5270 or shermel@angusjournal.com.