

July, 2007

A new association started here in the South this spring called the SE Buckaroo Association (www.sebuckaroo.com). They believe in the vaquero method of training which is a slow, steady process that turns out very responsive, well trained working ranch type horses. They don't have a place for gimmicks or crutches like tiedowns or martingales in their training, and the horses are ridden and trained in snaffles and hackamores for years before moving into the spade bit and becoming real bridle horses. Competitions require ranch type saddles and tack and period dress for the riders, but the workshops are casual. The only restrictions are no tiedowns or headsetting devices. I was truly an eclectic rider with an endurance saddle (at least it looked somewhat western), mecate reins, and English riding helmet, but everyone was very gracious despite my sticking out somewhat like a sore thumb.

I have no aspirations of becoming a vaquero rider, a ranch rodeo rider, or even competing in any of the events the association is planning to put on, but I still want a light, responsive, and well trained horse, and the group is very open to everyone who wants to learn good horsemanship. When the Buckaroo Association recently held a ranch/trail obstacle workshop, I took Baron, my 10 year old gelding who had done a little bit of everything. The group was predominantly QHs, but there was one other foxtrotter there too. We had a number of tasks/obstacles to complete. It wasn't a race but rather a demonstration of good horsemanship.

It started off with the mounting. Most everyone demonstrated that their horse would stand still while they mounted from the ground. I chose to sit on top of a panel and have Baron step sideways over to me to slide on. I got a nice comment from one of the judges for that!

Next we had to ride into a box and demonstrate turning the forequarters and turning the hindquarters and then walk out of the box and pick up a canter through a trail in the woods. At the end of that short trail, we had to stop and throw a lariat at a "cow". My rope throwing skills are pretty weak, and instead of getting the rope over the head, I hit the "shoulder". We got high points despite my throwing, because my horse demonstrated that he was ok with me fumbling with the rope, building and swinging a loop, and throwing it. Then we were on to pulling a log to a certain point, riding to a tree where there was a slicker hanging and put it on, ride to a fence and remove the slicker, and over to a dropdown that the horses had to jump about 2 1/2 feet down. The course then took us through some more woods and over a wooden bridge, back to the dropdown that was now a jump up, through two barrels that were on top of a big blue tarp and over to another clump of woods where there were several trees in a line which we had to serpentine through backwards. The last obstacle was some scaffolding that had big tarps hung on each side that we had to ride through.

I'm proud to say that Baron did as well as most of the QHs in the workshop, and better than many. There wasn't an obstacle there that he refused or had trouble with. The other foxtrotter held his own pretty well too, although he needed some more rope work.

The next workshop coming up is cattle sorting, and yes, we plan to be there. My husband plans to ride one of our three year olds in it and I'll ride Baron again. Who knows, maybe one of these days, we'll see some real cowboys using foxtrotters in their ranch rodeo competitions.

August, 2007

Well, one of the hottest days this summer, with temperatures over 100, was the date for the cattle sorting clinic. It sounded like too much fun to miss, so we loaded up Baron (10 yrs.) and Stripe (3 yrs. and just started under saddle this spring) and went. Ours were the only gaited horses there among a crowd of mostly Quarter Horses. The Buckaroo Association believes in getting the job done with the least amount of stress on cattle, horse, and rider, so speed was NOT the object, nor were tiedowns and other gimmicks allowed.

There were five calves with numbers on their sides located in a pen at one end of the arena. Two riders had the task of opening the gate to the pen from horseback and sorting them out in order, starting with whatever number was given them. Since Baron has the most experience out in the world and has been around cows a little bit, he was the designated gate opener and calf sorter. Gregg and Stripe stayed near the gate to turn back any calf coming out that might be out of sequence.

Once we had the calves all out of the pen and in the big arena and the gate shut, Gregg and Stripe flatfoot walked to the other end and got that gate open, and then we drifted the group down to the new pen and into it. We had seven minutes to get the job done but finished in 5 minutes, 24 seconds.

While we were riding, there were two judges scoring both of us as to how well we were accomplishing the task. They were looking for Cattle Handling skills such as reading cattle, efficiency, fluidity/teamwork, quietness, and cows completed and also Horsemanship skills including quietness of horse, responsiveness of horse, stopping, backing, and rollback.

Each skill was worth 10 points, and with the grace of a cooperative group of calves and laid back horses, we earned respectable scores of 74 and 75 from both of the judges on our first go round. We had the opportunity to ride again, but with the heat, we elected to sit in the shade, watch, and rehydrate instead.

It was lots of fun to do and to have our horses hold their own and better against a breed that is more typically used with cattle these days. I still doubt we will end up competing in any ranch rodeos because rope throwing is beyond us, not the horses, but us! It also involves getting different tack and clothes. It's a lot of fun to have a purpose for all the moves we've practiced while training using natural horsemanship skills.