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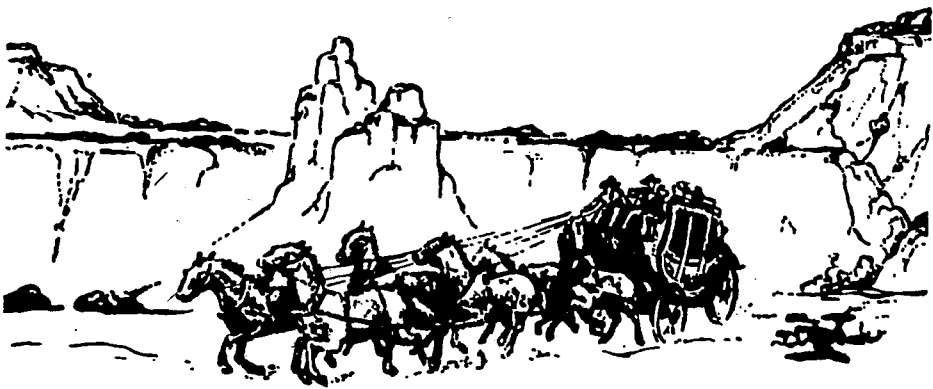
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IN THE ABUNDANT and variegated field of cowboy lore, fact and fiction, few figures play a more important or exciting role than the old-time cow horse. Without him there could never have been a cattle industry as we know it. Indeed, the cow pony quite as much as the cowboy symbolizes the "Golden Age" of the cattle business and the way of life that characterized it. Like his human associates he was tough, spunky, and shrewd; like them he was weather- and work-scarred; like them he was contrary at times, but loyal and hard-working. He was, in short, the perfect brute counterpart of the old-time cowhand. The horse is still used in cattle work, but the real "old-time" cow pony, like the way of life he represented, belongs mainly to the past.

Material on the cow horse is plentiful in the literature of the West and Southwest but is widely dispersed, falling into four main groups: 1) personal reminiscences; 2) historical or "technical" works, based on research and dealing with the origins, characteristics, and skills of the cow horse; 3) legendary accounts—not necessarily apocryphal, but unauthenticated—of "super" cow ponies; and 4) pure fiction, of which some (like Ross Santee's) is excellent, but much of which is romanticized or sentimentalized *ad nauseam*.

The Western Cow Pony

LLOYD N. JEFFREY

It is generally agreed that the cow horse is descended from wild offspring of the horses brought over by the Conquistadores in the sixteenth century, hence the name "Spanish horse" or "Mexican horse."¹ These animals were mainly of Arabian stock, the strain usually preferred by the Spaniards. Graham points out that the Arabian horses introduced into the New World

1. In this discussion I am indebted to L. F. Sheffy, *The Spanish Horse on the Great Plains* [n.p., n.d.]; James K. Greer, *From Bois d'arc to Barbed Wire* (Dallas, 1936), 335 ff.; and the following monographs in *Mustangs and Cow Horses* (Austin, 1940), hereafter referred to as *Mustangs*, edited by J. F. Dobie, M. C. Boatright, and H. H. Ransom: Frank Collinson, "Fifty Thousand Mustangs," Thomas O. Dwyer, "From Mustangs to Mules," R. B. C. Graham, "The Horse of the Pampas," and G. C. Robinson, "Mustangs and Mustanging in Southwest Texas."

probably came from Córdoba, a place long noted for its fine Arabian mounts. Possibly the blood of these horses ultimately can be traced back to a Barbary strain. In any case, there can be little doubt that these newcomers—"first comers" rather—were of Arabian stock; and their wild progeny, the "mustangs," revealed the strain in their "small heads, full, bold, and lustrous eyes, wide nostrils, small ears, delicate withers, well-set shoulders, and flat bones from the knees and hocks down."² They were rather small, usually standing fourteen or fifteen hands high and weighing eight or nine hundred pounds. The original stock had surely degenerated to some extent through excessive inbreeding, but this tendency might have been checked somewhat by the instinctive propensity of herd leaders to drive away yearling fillies each year.

These wild descendants of the mounts ridden by Cortés and his cohorts ordinarily ran in herds of thirty to fifty, but often small herds of wild horses combined to form very large ones running commonly into the hundreds and not infrequently into the thousands, according to well-authenticated reports. These herds roamed widely, drifting with the seasons, and by an early date had spread over all the southern plains country. The stallion that "bossed" a herd established his position by conquest.

These horses were generically called "mustangs," but there is some disagreement as to the origin of this word. Robinson asserts that "the word *mustang* comes from the Spanish *mesteño*, which comes from *mesta*—a group of stockraisers. Horses that escaped from a range controlled by a *mesta* and ran wild were called *mesteños*, the suffix *eño* meaning 'pertaining to' or 'belonging to.'"³ Greer, on the other hand, maintains that the word derives from a "confusion of two Spanish words, *mestengo* and *mostrenco*, meaning wild or without a master."⁴ The word "mustang" is indisputably of Spanish or more properly of Mexican origin, and this points to a fact which, though perhaps obvious, deserves emphasis: the Mexican *rancheros* had caught and used the mustang long before stock raising was undertaken in Texas. Consequently, early ranchers in Texas learned about the capture, breaking, and training of mustangs entirely from the Mexicans.

Although "mustanging" was going on in Texas at least as early as the late 1840's and early 50's, it made little progress until after the Civil War. Most

2. Dwyer, in *Mustangs*, 53.

3. Robinson, in *Mustangs*, 3.

4. Greer, *op. cit.*, 335.

early settlers in Texas regarded the mustangs as nuisances: they attacked the homesteaders' horses, or mixed with them and "spoiled" them, or, worst of all, drove away their blooded mares. To these first settlers in Texas, who were used to fine "American" horses, the battle-scarred, brush-scratched, weather-beaten mustang seemed a sorry, scrubby "critter," and the settlers were strongly opposed to any mixing of this wretched-looking stuff with their blooded stock. For this reason mustangs often were shot as pests in the early days.⁵

Gradually early ranchers in Texas became aware of the potential usefulness of the mustang. They began to take note of his good points: though certainly not beautiful, he was alert and self-reliant, he was sure-footed and well-gaited, he could go longer without food or water than most horses, and he had unusual recuperative powers in his short and rather stocky body. The realization of these facts, the need for good cow horses, and the example set by Mexican ranchers combined to make "mustanging" very popular in Texas during the late 1860's and 70's.

The capture of wild horses was ordinarily undertaken in the spring, when they were in a weakened state after the rigors of a plains winter. The mode of capture varied with such factors as the size of the herd, the number of men taking part in the hunt, the terrain and weather. Three basic stratagems were employed: driving the horses into a concealed or camouflaged corral, often near a waterhole; driving them into a dead-end ravine or into one that had been blocked off artificially at one end; and "walking them down."⁶ Individual animals were taken by roping, a dangerous and difficult process, or by "creasing" or "nicking"—less dangerous but more difficult. In creasing, the idea was to send a rifle bullet through the upper vertebrae of the animal's neck near the spinal cord, thus stunning the mustang for a moment and enabling the hunter to tie him down before he "came to." Virtually every man who has talked or written about mustanging has mentioned creasing,⁷ but, so far as I was able to ascertain, not one ever witnessed a specific instance in which the

5. See in *Mustangs* the chapters by Collinson, Dwyer, and Robinson referred to previously and also George Catlin, "Comanche Horses" (II), Ruth Dodson, "Texas-Mexican Horse-Breaking," Florence Fenley, "The Mustanger Who Turned Mustang," Homer Hoyt, "Mustanging on the Staked Plains," Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, "The Ghost Horse," and J. W. Moses, "A Mustanger of 1850." See also Greer, *op. cit.*, 69, 77, 336.

6. For a full account of this method of catching mustangs, see Robinson in *Mustangs*.

7. See in *Mustangs*: Catlin, 145-46, 150; Collinson, 75-76; Dobic, "The Deathless Pacing White Stallion," 179-80; Frank Lockard, "Black Kettle," 110; and O. W. Nolen, "Nicking the Mustang," 44-46.

practice was successful, and many doubted that it was practicable at all. Probably creasing was never used with anything like consistent success by even the most phenomenal marksman. By its very nature the act would seem to demand an unreasonable degree of cooperation from fate.

After a herd of mustangs had been "localized," the problem of how to move them to the ranch was usually solved in one of three ways: by "necking" the mustangs to gentle horses, by "clogging" (fastening heavy wooden blocks or forked limbs just above the front hoofs), or by "sidelining" (tying together a front and hind leg on the same side, leaving the animal just enough freedom to make normal walking possible). Occasionally a proud stallion would tolerate no form of restriction on his liberty and would, if he could not escape, kill himself fighting the hated ropes. If he was immobilized despite all his furious strength, he still might refuse to eat and drink, making it necessary either to destroy or to release him. Of such stuff was the mustang made, and the cow pony has retained, throughout successive generations, much of his pride and fire and love of freedom.

In the early days of Texas ranching, the breaking and training of horses was ordinarily done by Mexican horse-handlers, who through long experience had become experts, often true artists. The actual breaking was done by the *domador*, the training (teaching the horse to respond to the rein, etc.) by the *arrendador*. The latter was naturally the more skilled of the two and was therefore more highly regarded. The *arrendador* was usually an older Mexican who had been a *domador* in his youth. The punishing nature of the *domador's* work tended to make his career in that job rather short; few men could spend day after day being smashed against a saddle, or against the ground, without becoming "stove up" at any early age. Sometimes, to be sure, a *domador* would continue as such into old age, but would leave the actual leather-pounding to younger men, who, "full of beans" and eager to prove their skill as *jinetes* (bronc riders), asked for the privilege of risking their bones on one wild-eyed *potro* after another.

Before the mustang was ridden he had to be "softened down" a bit. First a horse would be caught and blindfolded, and the *jaquima* ("hackamore") put on his head. A rope attached to the *jaquima* was then passed around the horse's nose. It was this trick that made it possible for one man to hold the wild and powerful mustang after he was released; there are few horses that cannot be subdued by a "twitch," or loop of rope around the nose. Finally the

tapoyo, or blindfold, would be jerked away and the *potro* would be allowed to run—in fact, he would be frightened and even whipped to *make* him run until exhausted, so as to take some of the wildness out of him. After a day or two of this treatment the mustang was usually ready for a “go” with the saddle. He was again blindfolded, and if he was bad about kicking, his right hind foot was tied in a loop that could be easily released. Now the *domador* would mount the animal, whip off the blindfold, and slacken the loop. Then, of course, anything might happen. In the end, though, the *potro* would be tamed. Having been ridden once, he was a *quebrantado* (partly broken horse) and would be ridden twice daily thereafter until completely saddle-broken.

If the mustang was a promising animal, he was now turned over to the expert hands of the *arrendador*, whose job was to train the horse to the bridle. To quote from Ruth Dodson’s excellent account:

The initial training was with a *bozalillo*—a noose, often finely plaited of hair or rawhide and decorated—held in place by a light head-stall. When the horse could be whirled first to the right and then to the left, with only the slightest pull on the reins of the *bozalillo*; when he could be put into a run and then stopped in his tracks, with only a slight tightening of the reins, then he was ready for the bridle. The *bozalillo* was used in conjunction with the bridle, each with a separate pair of reins, until the horse was rein perfect; then it was discarded and the bridle used alone. By this time the horse was so well trained that the bridle was brought into only the slightest use. . . .

To accomplish this training, much patience and much, much practice was required. But there was always plenty of time, for the *arrendador* required something like eighteen months in which to give a finished rein to any horse that he considered worthy of his time and efforts.⁸

This painstaking and elaborate course in equine education was reserved for animals that looked to be worth the trouble. It would be a mistake to believe that the Mexicans (or later, the Texans) spent so much time and effort on “run of the mill” mustangs. Usually the cow horse learned the hard way—through experience.

Though most of the early ranchers in Texas knew how to break and train domestic horses, they knew nothing of working with mustangs. They caught on quickly, however, under the tutelage of the *domadores* and *arrendadores*. Like their Mexican preceptors they treated their charges roughly, but the

8. *Mustangs*, 284.

mustangs could take rough treatment and in fact required it, although of course consistently brutal treatment would ruin a good mustang. Dwyer condemns the Mexican style of horse-breaking as unnecessarily severe, insisting that the "American method" better preserved the spirit as well as the strength of the horse. But the spirit of the mustang was durable, and there is little evidence that the cow ponies trained by American cowhands using Mexican techniques were lacking in either strength or mettle.

Occasionally, of course, a particularly promising animal would be broken more gently than his fellows. For instance, the "sacking method" might be used. A folded sack or blanket was passed over the mustang's body until he lost his fear of it; next the blanket would be placed on his back; finally if all went well, the saddle would be applied with comparatively little trouble.

Since many early cattlemen in Texas were accustomed to "blooded" horses, it was natural that they should try to "breed up" the mustang.⁹ Recognizing the superiority of the "Spanish horse" when it came to handling cattle, ranchers believed that by crossing his blood with that of registered stock a "super" cow horse could be produced, one that would combine the toughness and "cow sense" of the mustang with the docility and other propitious qualities of more "aristocratic" animals. "Practically no producer of cow horses," says Hastings, "appears to have been satisfied to stay with the Spanish blood in its purity. The difficulty of getting satisfactory Spanish sires may largely explain this fact, but probably meanness had much to do with the popular desire to breed the strain up without losing the cow instinct."¹⁰ Nevertheless, there was little "scientific" breeding until the second decade of the twentieth century. On the whole, cow-pony breeding was, in Hastings's picturesque phrase, "a pure case of scrambled eggs." Although most ranchers attempted little or nothing in the way of "scientific breeding," this is not to say that they were careless in their selection of sires. Hastings is "convinced that the whole problem of breeding cow horses has been saved by the 'law of selection of sires'—not registered or purebred stallions, the early-day sires being selected by men who knew a good horse, and used him because he was a good horse."¹¹ To illustrate his point, Hastings sketches the history of the horse string on the famous SMS Ranch, where he was manager for many years. In 1882, fifty

9. My chief source here is Frank S. Hastings' *A Ranchman's Recollections* (Chicago, 1921).

10. *Ibid.*, 162.

11. *Ibid.*, 160.

Spanish mares were bought from a transient horse dealer whose stock looked good. For a sire, a fine white stallion purported to be an Arabian—at any rate, an animal possessed of “nerve, endurance, style and action, a horse all over”—was obtained. As a result of this intelligent selection of brood mares and of sire the SMS had a superior *remuda* (string of cow horses) for many years afterwards.

Greer confirms Hastings' remarks on the breeding of cow horses: “One might think that in a land where good cow ponies were so easily recognized and so much appreciated that those who raised their own horses would have carefully produced them. But such was not the case. Fortunately the men who purchased sires for their herds of mares were usually men who had good horse sense. Such men cared little about registered stallions, but they knew a good horse when they saw one and so bought and used him.”¹² Haphazard though these breeding methods might have been from the viewpoint of the “expert,” the fact remains that “they worked.”

After 1900 and especially after 1910, many ranchers began to try scientific breeding, using registered sires.¹³ Opinions differ as to whether this trend led to the production of a better cow horse. Dwyer asserts that the “breeding up” of Spanish horses by the introduction of fine-blooded “American” horses was highly successful, since the best qualities of both strains were preserved.¹⁴ Sheffy, on the opposite side, says that the rancher lost much more than he gained by crossing the cow pony with more “reputable” types; that in fact the Spanish horse was virtually ruined by the infusion of too much “good blood” into the hardy old strain. According to Sheffy, who is probably nearer right than Dwyer, the horses produced by crossing Spanish mares with thoroughbred stallions were usually larger, better-looking, and gentler than the old-time cow horse, but were also too high-strung, short on stamina, and—worst of all—often lacking in the “cow instinct.” As a result of mixing of breeds the true Spanish horse began to disappear. Today he is, like the long-horn, little more than a memory.

A really good cow horse was a highly prized animal. Any mount could “tag a steer down the trail,” but not every ranch horse had the makings of a “top” cow pony. Hastings estimates that of the horses selected for cow work,

12. Greer, *op. cit.*, 355.

13. *Ibid.*, 355-56; Hastings, *op. cit.*, 160.

14. See in *Mustangs*, 59.

sixty percent made "fair" cow ponies, but only twenty percent made "really good ones" and only ten percent "crackerjacks."¹⁵ The best cow horse was a product of nature, instinct, and training: "His first qualifications are speed and endurance. Nevertheless, one may have these and still not have much of a cow horse. He may be all right for ordinary rounding or line work, but he is not a cow horse unless he has 'cow sense' as a dominant characteristic. Training has much to do with it, but he must have the instinct for holding a roped animal, 'turning on a half-dollar,' and countering every move of an animal that is being cut out."¹⁶ Hence the necessary qualifications of a first-rate cow pony were both physical and mental, or rather temperamental.

However bright and amenable to instruction a pony might be, he was not worth much to the cattleman unless he was also "tough as a boot." All day, every day, during the work season he had to run, turn, stop, and run again till every muscle was wrung dry; he had to stop and hold wild, powerful range cattle often weighing more than he did; he had to endure heat, dust, rain, and hail. Often, too, he had to put up with very rough treatment from his rider.

Despite the punishing nature of the cow pony's work and the hard treatment he often received, the average pony gave about twelve years' service. In fact, many stayed on the job eighteen or even twenty years, though as a rule these animals were specialists—usually expert cutting horses that did only part-time service.

The cow pony's most important work was of course "cutting," or separating from a large herd of cattle stock of a particular brand or of a particular type—fat steers, calves, stock cows. Any horse worthy of the name could be used for cutting, but a really good "cutting horse"¹⁷ was in a class by himself: he was the true aristocrat of the *remuda*.

The process of cutting cattle from a herd, though simple enough in theory, is in practice quite difficult and intricate; it is, as Dobie says, "the supreme point at which cow work passes into art." The basic factor making

15. Hastings, *op. cit.*, 162.

16. *Ibid.*

17. For material on the "cutting horse" see: J. F. Dobie, "As Smart as a Cutting Horse," in *Mustangs*, 403-13; Siringo, *op. cit.*, 230-32; Sheffy, *op. cit.* (pages not numbered); Frank Reeves, "Cutting Horses Must Be Good," in *The Cattleman*, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (Sept., 1941), 121 ff.; and Dobie, "The Spanish Cow Pony," in *The Cattleman*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (Sept., 1943), 100 ff. This last-named work is in my opinion the best short treatment of the subject to be found.

the job difficult is the natural gregariousness of cattle. A bunch of livestock being handled nearly always wants to stick together. This trait is a helpful one in many of the operations of cow-handling, but the propensity of cattle to be "sociable" is one of the most exasperating things that the cattleman has to contend with. The herd instinct of cows was especially troublesome in the old days of stock-raising, when fenced pastures and the slow, tractable beef cattle of today were unknown.

The cutting horse not only had to be tough; he had to be faster and more agile than the "cow brutes" he worked with, which, in the days of half-wild range cattle, meant that he had to be very fast and agile indeed. But nearly all cow ponies were sufficiently endowed with these purely physical qualities. The really good cutting horse had to have something more: that mysterious quality known variously as "cow sense," "the cow instinct," or "cow savvy." That is, he had to be able to anticipate and counter each move of the animal being cut out; he had to be able to "turn on a dime" and double back after a steer, without conscious thought and without any signal from his rider. The good cutting horse knew his business. He was an artist and took pride in his work. He needed little direction from his cowboy master and, indeed, often resented being told what to do. As a rule the cowboy would do well to let the horse "have his head" and do things his own way.

In addition to "cow sense," the real cutting horse had to possess mental balance. Cutting cattle was no job for a brilliant but high-strung animal. Such a one would excite the cattle, making them "jumpy" and causing them to lose weight through unnecessary running and to bruise one another with their horns. The good cutting horse never got "all lathered up" about his job, and like any "old hand" he never wasted effort. He took his time in moving through the cattle. But he could "move into high gear" with amazing alacrity when speed was demanded: when, for example, a steer had been separated from the main herd and had to be rushed to the "cut" (the group of cattle already parted from the main herd) before it had a chance to double back. Siringo gives a fine picture of the smart and experienced cutting horse at work: "A 'cutting' pony to be considered a 'Joe-dandy' has to be awful quick as well as limber. An old experienced one can be guided with the little finger—that is, by holding the bridle reins on the end of the little finger. While performing the 'cutting' act he will move along as though half asleep, until the animal [being cut out] is near the outer edge [of the herd], when

all at once he will make a spring toward and take the steer out at a break-neck gait. No matter how the animal dodges in its mad effort to get back he will be right at its heels or side."¹⁸

It is no wonder that the cutting horse came to occupy a unique position of esteem in the cattle country. He was often held up as the archetype of shrewdness, skill, and practical wisdom: "In the language of the range, to say that somebody is 'as smart as a cutting horse' is to say that he is smarter than a Philadelphia lawyer, smarter than a steel trap, smarter than a coyote, smarter than a Harvard graduate—all combined. There just can't be anything smarter than a smart cutting horse."¹⁹ Many are the stories of cutting horses that were almost humanly intelligent.²⁰ There are accounts of horses that could cut from a herd all stock of a particular age, size, sex, or color once the type to be cut out had been shown them; there are even tales of cow ponies that could "read" brands and ear marks. Some, as Dobie says, could even do this without a rider: "Any time Doc Burris, a character from Karnes County, got a chance he'd talk about his dun cutting horse. 'All I had to do,' said Doc, 'was to show Dun Man what brands I wanted cut out of a herd. Then I'd pull off saddle, bridle [sic], everything and dismount myself, and that dun horse would start in and cut out every critter wanted.'"²¹ This sort of thing was not part of regular cow work, being done for "show" purposes. Sometimes a cowboy had a favorite cutting horse, often an older one no longer used for routine work, that he used on special occasions when he wanted to "shine." The pitting of one such virtuoso against another was a popular form of entertainment when circumstances permitted it. When they did not, the opponents were men instead of horses, and the "competition" was verbal—hence some of the tall tales about cutting horses that were told around the chuck wagon or at the stockyards. It is axiomatic that "the first one to talk hasn't a chance," and any cowboy hated to see his pet cutting horse bested.

Cutting horses are not used so much as they once were, and they need not be so highly trained as formerly. There are obvious reasons for this: the

18. Charles A. Siringo, *A Texas Cow Boy, or, Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony* (New York, 1886), 232 ff.

19. Dobie, "As Smart as a Cutting Horse," in *Mustangs*, 403.

20. See *ibid.*, 406-07, 412-13; Dobie, "The Spanish Cow Pony" (*The Cattleman*, XXX, 4); Sheffy, *op. cit.*; and Siringo, *op. cit.*, 230.

21. "As Smart as a Cutting Horse," in *Mustangs*, 407.

comparatively docile nature of modern cattle, the replacement of open range by fenced pastures, and the use of chutes and trucks. But despite these and other major changes in the cattle industry, the cutting horse has not yet outlived his usefulness, and a good one is still highly prized by cattlemen.²²

Another specialist among cow horses was the "night horse,"²³ who stood just below the cutting horse in cow-pony nobility. Nearly any good cow pony could be used for night work, but really good night horses were relatively scarce and much sought after. Usually they were reserved for nothing but night work. The main duty of the night horse was to guard the herd and keep it under control, though he was also used for night driving and for emergency jobs that came up during hours of darkness.

The "top" night horse, like the expert cutting horse, had to possess certain qualifications. He had to have good "night eyes"; horses, like men, vary in their ability to see in the dark. His hearing also had to be acute. The very best night horses could "herd by ear," detecting the positions and motions of cattle when visibility was so bad that even their keen eyes were almost useless, as during a heavy rain or dust storm. The night horse had to be alert. No less than the cutting horse he had to have "cow sense"; he had to know about what the "brutes" would do in any particular situation and to react accordingly. He had to have a good sense of direction. He had to be exceptionally surefooted; night stampedes were fairly common in the old days of cattle raising, and many a cowboy's life was saved because he rode a first-rate night horse with "plenty of savvy."²⁴ The night horse, like the cutting horse, had to have mental balance; for obvious reasons a high-strung, excitable animal could never be satisfactory for night work. And, he had to be able to adapt his sleeping habits to the requirements of his job.

Many night horses gave little to the cutting horse in shrewdness. Dobie tells of Old Sid, a veteran night horse that could only with the greatest difficulty be persuaded to stay on duty after the hour for his relief had arrived.²⁵

22. See *ibid.*, 403-04, and Frank Reeves, "Cowboys and Their Horses," in *The Cattleman*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (Sept., 1943), 13.

23. See both articles by Dobie, and Sheffy, *op. cit.* (pages not numbered). Sheffy's account of the night horse is the best that I have been able to find.

24. See J. F. Dobie, *The Longhorns* (Boston, 1947), 87 ff., and Ross Santee, *Cowboy* (New York, 1928), 228.

25. "As Smart as a Cutting Horse," in *Mustangs*, 408.

Superior roping horses were also much in demand in the cattle country.²⁶ The roping horse did not have to possess the exceptional qualities of mind and temperament of the expert cutting horse; any cow pony that was "worth his feed" could usually be shaped into a good roping mount. But a "top" roping horse had to be fast enough to catch up with the most swift-footed steer. He had to be very alert, and he had to have "cow sense," so that the cowboy could concentrate on handling the rope. He had to be unusually agile—able to turn sharply, to double back quickly, and to stop almost in his tracks. He had to be husky enough to check and hold the biggest and wildest steer. It goes without saying that he had to have a great deal of courage. Finally, he had to be level-headed and dependable when an emergency arose. If, as not infrequently happened, a roped animal "got on the prod" and charged the horse and cowboy, an excitable mount could cause serious injury or even death to both himself and rider.

The main things that the roping horse had to learn were to "sit down hard" when a steer was caught, to face the roped animal (since most of a horse's strength is in his forequarters), and to keep the rope taut.²⁷

Another special horse was the "distance horse,"²⁸ of which little need be said except that his gifts were mainly physical: good wind, sturdy feet, ability to go a long way on comparatively little food and water, and general hardiness. Still other mounts that were more or less special are mentioned by some writers; for instance, Dobie speaks of the "brush horse."²⁹ For that matter, almost every cow horse was a "specialist" in the sense that he was better qualified for one kind of work than for any other.

Much sentimental nonsense has been written on the bond of affection between the cowboy and his horse. But fiction of this sort errs in degree only: there was a strong feeling of kinship between man and horse on the range.³⁰ The cow horse was inseparable from the cowboy's way of life. He was not only the most essential tool of the cowhand's job, but was also his chief com-

26. See Sheffy, *op. cit.*

27. See Paul Coze, "Calf Roping in Pictures," in *Hoofs and Horns*, Vol. IX, No. 6 (Dec., 1939). This tableau illustrates the roping of calves, not mature animals, but it give a good idea of the general method of roping from horseback.

28. See Sheffy, *op. cit.*

29. See *The Longhorns*, 320 ff.

30. Among others, Hastings, Santee, Sheffy, and Siringo do a good job of depicting the relationship between cowboy and cow pony.

panion and quite often his only one. It was quite natural that there was usually a real feeling of attachment between horse and rider. In most cases this rapport was not quite the idyllic thing so dear to the hearts of western-fiction writers and movie producers. Both cowboy and cow horse were tough, shrewd, and game, and each knew and respected the other for what he was. Cruel cowboys and vicious cow ponies were not the rule, but few cowboys were too good to curse their mounts or even to bestow an occasional slap or kick on their leathery hides; few cow horses were too good to pitch and kick when they had a tight cinch or a sore back, or when they were simply so "full of the devil" that they couldn't hold it. But each was too tough and resilient to be bothered by a little rough treatment; both expected and perhaps even liked a certain amount of it. The cowboy might "cuss" his own mount freely, but he would resent any criticism of his horse from another cowboy and would be ready to "whip" the man who laid a heavy hand on the animal. There was a good deal of rough give-and-take between the cowboy and the cow horse, yet each felt a real, if seldom demonstrated, affection for the other.

Doubtless there were some cowboys who, true to Western-story convention, never spoke a harsh word to their horses. This was especially apt to be true when a cowboy owned his mount, though sometimes a man would become very much attached to a pony assigned to his "string" from the ranch *remuda*. As Siringo observes, any ranch foreman or "trail boss" who took a favorite mount out of a man's string would have a "cowboy on the war-path" on his hands. If the cowboy had trained the horse himself, he naturally valued him all the more highly. If the cowhand owned the horse, he would be extremely reluctant to sell him. If pressed to set a price on his animal he would often quote an exorbitant one to discourage the prospective buyer. Sometimes, however, the latter would accept the terms anyway (or pretend to), and the embarrassed cowboy would be forced to admit that he wouldn't sell his "top horse" for any amount of money.

Nearly every old cowboy reminiscing about the past recalls a favorite cow horse—one that was not just another good pony nor even just a highly valued helper, but a cherished companion.³¹ Charles Siringo owned many horses—among them Bony-part, Ranger, Satan, Gotch, Yankee-Doodle, Dam-

31. For further information on cow-horse names, see Dobie, "Cow-Horse Names, Colors, and Cures," in *Mustangs*, 234-49, and Florence Fenley, "Cow-Horse Sense," in *The Cattleman*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (Sept., 1943), 15 ff.

fino, Croppy, and Creeping Moses—but far and away his favorite was Whiskey-peat (also spelled Whiskey-peat).³² Nowhere does Siringo launch into a sentimental encomium of Whiskey-peat, but there is no doubt about his feeling for the tough little horse. In describing his various travels about the Southwest, Siringo mentions in a matter-of-fact way that at the end of a day's journey he always gave Whiskey-peat a good feed—of corn, when possible—and bedded him down comfortably. Clearly his horse's comfort was as important to him as his own. Reasonably good care of one's mount on a long horseback journey is of course just common sense, but Siringo's concern over Whiskey-peat's well-being was more than pragmatic. More than once Siringo says that he was always careful to leave his "top horse" in good hands when he had to leave him for a time, but he never left the pony behind if he could help it. When he began his long journey home from "up north," he chose to make the long, hard trek on horseback rather than to ride comfortably by train because he "couldn't even bear the *thought* of parting with Whiskey-peat, and to hire a car to take him around by rail would be too costly." While the two were on the way home, Whiskey-peat went lame near Denton and Siringo chose to wait over until his horse was fully recovered rather than to ride him lame or to sell him. When, later, Siringo left home once more to go back to the range country, he didn't take Whiskey-peat because he wanted to return by rail the next year, even though "leaving Whiskey-peat behind was almost as severe as having sixteen jaw-teeth pulled." But Siringo was never to see his "top horse" again: "I failed to come back that fall as I expected, therefore never saw the faithful animal again: he died the following spring."

Like most cowboys and cattlemen, Siringo shows little talent for heart-rending panegyric, but only the most insensitive reader will be unmoved by his laconic account. That cowboys often felt genuine affection for their mounts cannot be doubted; and there is abundant evidence that in the simple yet inscrutable way of animals the horse returned his owner's devotion. Although fiction has anthropomorphized and sentimentalized this feeling in a way tolerable to neither our rational nor our aesthetic sense, the tradition of affection between cowboy and cow pony seems to have an undeniable foundation in fact.

32. Siringo, *op. cit.*, 129-36.