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Freeze Branding Of Horses

Freeze branding is one of the best methods of identifying horses. It is the process of using a super cold iron rather than the traditional hot iron method. When done properly, the cold iron destroys the pigment-producing hair color follicles. White hair will outline the brand site once hair growth returns.

There are many advantages to using freeze branding: **1)** Less painful to the horse; **2)** The brand is legible all year round and can be read from a distance; **3)** There is little or no hide damage; **4)** Usually there is little or no blotching of the brand; **5)** It is definitely a deterrent to theft and the recovery of horses is enhanced because of the visibility and the difficulty in changing of the brand as compared to hot iron brands which can be easily altered.

Freeze branding does have some disadvantages also: **1)** More time consuming (usually takes from three to ten minutes per horse); **2)** Requires more steps and more equipment; **3)** Brands are not immediately legible for ownership identification; **4)** Some states do not recognize freeze branding as a legal method of ownership; **5)** Results may vary from horse to horse and time of year the branding is performed; **6)** Freeze branding can be expensive if you have only a few horses to brand (the cost will go down considerably if you are branding a larger number of horses) **7)** There are several safety factors that must be considered when freeze branding as compared to hot iron branding.

Horses are generally branded on the jaw, shoulder, thigh, or butt (beside the tail). When you brand a registered horse, you should notify the breed association so that the brand can be noted on the registration papers. Before you brand a horse, no matter whether or not it is registered, you should check with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and register your brand because in Louisiana it is against the law to brand an animal with an unregistered holding brand.

Freeze brands can be made of different types of materials. It has been found that copper is the best metal to use because it will hold the cold temperature longer. Brass and steel may be used, but the time that the brand is held on the skin has to be increased. No matter what the brand is made of, it should be from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick on the face and from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches from the face to the back of the iron. Brands can be from 2 to 4 inches in height (shorter brands can be used for younger horses because they tend to grow in size as the horse gets older).

Cooling the brands can be done by using dry ice and alcohol or liquid nitrogen. Although liquid nitrogen will get the brands colder, it is much safer to use dry ice and alcohol. **If alcohol is to be used as a coolant, it must be 99% methyl, ethyl, or isopropyl.** Any alcohol of a less percentage will not work; it will turn to slush around the branding irons. Dry ice and alcohol will reach a temperature of approximately 160 to 180 degrees below zero. You will probably have to order the alcohol from a veterinarian or through a pharmacy. Dry ice can be obtained from welding suppliers or fire extinguisher suppliers. Twenty pounds of dry ice and three

gallons of 99% alcohol should last for 3 to 4 hours. Liquid nitrogen is a good source of coolant, but it is sometimes hard to obtain and it is much more dangerous to the user. **At all times, care should be taken to prevent the dry ice, alcohol, and liquid nitrogen from splashing on your skin or in your eyes. Alcohol is extremely flammable and should be used in open air or a well ventilated building. Always avoid smoking and keep this material away from any open flames or electric cattle prods. Vapor from these liquids can be dangerous to the tissues of your eyes and nose.**

At least three people are needed to freeze brand horses. You will need the following equipment to complete the procedure correctly: **a)** Twitch (may or may not be necessary depending of the temperament of your horse); **b)** Styrofoam ice chest approximately 18x10x12 inches so irons can stand upright when the heads are submerged in the liquid; **c)** Dry ice; **d)** 99% alcohol; **e)** Freeze branding irons, preferably with a T handle so that pressure can be applied; **f)** Leather gloves; **g)** Electric clippers (surgical blades preferred); **h)** Squirt bottle with 99% alcohol; **i)** Towel; **j)** Stopwatch; **k)** Fly spray.

The procedure for Freeze Branding is as follows:

- 1) With a hammer, break up the dry ice into particles about the size of golf balls or smaller and place them in the bottom of the Styrofoam ice chest (about a two inch layer on the bottom of the ice chest);
- 2) Pour in enough 99% alcohol to cover the head of the brand and the dry ice (if you use liquid nitrogen, you will not need the dry ice and you will need only a small amount of 99% alcohol, just pour in enough liquid nitrogen to cover the brand);
- 3) Immerse the irons in the dry ice and alcohol, making sure that the irons are covered by the liquid (irons will cause the liquid to bubble violently);

- 4) Allow 20 minutes for the irons to cool the first time;
- 5) Clip the area where the brand is to be applied as close as possible;
- 6) Soak the area that has been clipped with 99% alcohol using the spray bottle;
- 7) Rub off the liquid with the rag to clean the area;
- 8) When the irons are cooled down, re-soak the clipped area and immediately apply the cold branding iron to the surface and apply pressure (approximately 35 to 45 pounds of pressure, the brand should be shoved well in to the muscle area of the horse, it may be necessary to put the horse in a stock or up against the wall of the barn to keep the horse from moving away from this pressure);
- 9) At this time the brander says "on" and the timer starts the stop watch;
- 10) Apply constant pressure for the time allotted (see chart below) with a gentle rocking motion of the brand, never letting the face of the brand leave the horses skin;
- 11) When the allotted time is reached, the timer says "off" and immediately the brander removes the iron;
- 12) The brander immediately replaces the iron in to the coolant (if an iron needs to be used twice for example a number 22, give the iron from two to five minutes to re-cool).

Irons (Copper) should be applied to the horse for the following length of time:

- Liquid Nitrogen – 8 – 12 seconds
- Dry Ice and Alcohol 20 – 24 seconds
- This time may have to be increased if brass or steel irons are used (as much as 30 seconds may be necessary if you are using thin steel irons and dry ice and alcohol, you may have to experiment to see how long to hold your iron to get the desired brand)
- Darker colored horses usually require the minimum time suggested

- Lighter colored horse require the maximum time or a little longer (white horses can be branded but the hair will be killed and the brand will resemble a hot iron brand)
- The brander should calibrate their freeze branding irons by branding the recommended times and keeping records of times and results. Times could then be adjusted to fit the type and size of your irons.

Immediately following freeze branding you should see an indentation, the shape of the brand, in the skin that will feel slick and smooth to the touch. Within five minutes, the indentation will go away and swelling will begin. This swelling pattern will be in the shape of the brand, but will be two to three times the thickness. The swelling will be noticeable for up to five days or less. Once the swelling is gone, the brand will be hard if not impossible to see. Twenty to thirty days post branding, the brand will start to get flaky or scaly. During the third or fourth week, the scab will start to turn loose. Once the scab is gone, white, peach fuzz type hair should appear in about 30 days. Full hair growth will depend on the time of year when the horse is branded. Branding can be done at any time of the year, but horses that are branded about the time the new hair coat is starting seem to have brands that come in sooner.

If brands are held on for too long of a time period, the cold temperature will destroy the growth follicle of the hair. If this happens, no hair grows at all. On a light colored horse, this bald brand is desirable because the dark skin of the bald brand shows up better than a white brand.

A special thanks to Doug Householder, Gary Webb, Sam Wigington, and Jason Bruemmer with the Texas Agriculture Extension Service and Ron Torell and Willie Riggs with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Service for information on this topic.

Louisiana Stock Horse Association (LaSH) completes second year

For those of you that are not familiar with LaSH, it is an organization that conducts ranch horse competitions and educational programs throughout the state. The group has been in existence for 2½ years. LaSH conducts ten shows and clinics throughout the state each year. At each of these shows, there are 5 classes: Ranch Cutting; Working Cow Horse; Reining; Ranch Pleasure; and Ranch Trail. There are five divisions that a person can choose to compete in: Open; Cowboy (Non- Pro); Novice; Junior Horse; and Youth.

These competitions have proven to be both educational and fun. They are conducted in an atmosphere that is conducive to the whole family. Points are kept throughout the year and end of the year awards such as saddles, buckles, spurs, etc. are presented to the winners, not to mention the prize money to be won at each show.

The 2009 clinics and competitions will kick off in March in West Monroe at the Ike Hamilton Expo Center, in conjunction with the Louisiana Equine Council Exposition. Mr. Joe Wolters, noted trainer, will conduct the clinics.

The following is the 2009 LaSH schedule:

- March 14th and 15th - West Monroe (2 competitions)
- April 25th and 26th - Baton Rouge (clinic on Saturday, competition on Sunday)
- May 16th – Folsom – Good Guys Farm
- June 6th - LSU Alexandria (clinic prior to competition)
- July 11th and 12th - New Iberia (clinic on Saturday, competition on Sunday)
- August 8 - LSU Alexandria (clinic prior to competition)
- September 12th - LSU Alexandria (clinic prior to competition)
- October 3rd – Sulphur – West Cal Arena
- November 14th - LSU Alexandria (clinic prior to competition)

If you are interested in having fun with your horse and family, you need to check out the Louisiana Stock Horse Association.

For more information, contact:

Larry Rutledge (President) – (318) 348 – 6797
Johnny Boudreaux (V. Pres.) – (337) 893 – 6743
Judy Weisgerber (Secretary) – (337) 238 - 0193

Keeping Your Horse Healthy

Prepurchase exam: If you are planning on buying a new horse, have a veterinarian perform a prepurchase exam to look for pre-existing health problems. Depending on the intended use of the horse, these exams can be very basic or very extensive, including x-rays and other tests. A Coggins test should always be performed before buying a new horse.

Quarantine: Newly purchased animals and animals returning from an event should be tested for certain diseases before purchase, and then put in a quarantine area for 2-4 weeks. These animals can be shedding viruses that they pick up at the original farm or at an event, even though they may look normal. They are especially dangerous to pregnant broodmares as some of the viruses cause abortion. A good quarantine area is outside (sunlight is our best disinfectant), with access to shade, fresh water and hay, and no fence line contact with other horses (10 feet of space between fences).

Nutrition: The basis of a sound health program is a good nutrition program. A properly fed horse will have a better overall immune system than one that is under or over fed.

Proper exercise: Just like people, exercise is good for your horse. However, they also need to get in shape gradually, and be exercised consistently. “Monday morning disease” is a potentially deadly condition that can occur when horses that are not properly conditioned get overworked at an event (usually on the weekend, hence the name) and get muscle necrosis. Injuries, some very serious like

tendon bows, are also more common when horses are not kept in shape and properly warmed up before events.

Vaccinations: Vaccination recommendations vary depending on the use of the horse. All horses should be vaccinated for tetanus, encephalomyelitis and West Nile Virus. Some vaccination recommendations in Louisiana are different for other parts of the country, so a local veterinarian should be consulted for specific recommendations for each horse and farm.

Parasite Control: Many of the parasite control recommendations, like rotating dewormers, have changed recently. Some types of parasites have developed resistance to some dewormers, and require management of the environment for control. Like vaccination recommendations, the best parasite control programs are developed for each specific farm by a veterinarian familiar with the farm.

Hoof Care: Not all horses need to have shoes, but most will need to have hooves trimmed every 6-8 weeks. If horses are standing in wet conditions they can get thrush. Laminitis (“founder”) is a debilitating disease that needs veterinary attention immediately. Horses can founder on grain or grass.

Christine Navarre, Extension Veterinarian
LSU AgCenter

Saddle Selection

The saddle should be selected to fit the horse, rider and purpose or use of the saddle. Various different types of saddles are made and each have various functions and fit various horses.

Fitting the saddle to the horse is one of the most critical aspects of having a comfortable and willing horse. Each horse’s back is different; they have different widths, lengths, withers and placements of the saddle. In order to fit the horse you have to find a tree and/or

saddle that matches that horse's back. Trees are made with various types of bars from the wider Quarter horse bars to the narrower A-fork type bars. The ideal way to determine if the saddle fits the horse's back is to put it on the horse's back and rock it side to side and forward to backwards. If the saddle rocks from side to side and doesn't fit the horse's withers then the saddle will create pressure points on one side or the other and the saddle will roll when you shift weight. If the saddle moves on the horse's back, soreness and dry spots or white spots will develop. When you rock the saddle from front to back it should not move. If it does move you have pressure points. If it is high in the middle and rocking from shoulders to the loin or if it has pressure points at the shoulders and back and it is not in contact with the horse in the middle of the back then these pressure points will cause soreness and be a problem for your horse. One of the best ways to determine fit is to put a piece of cloth on the horse's back and sit the saddle on it. Pull on the various points of the cloth to see if it is loose at various points. The points where the cloth moves indicates an area of no contact. Pressure points will be those areas where the cloth will not move. Ideally the saddle should fit evenly from shoulders to loins and from side to side on the horse's back. If the saddle does not fit, a good saddle maker can make some adjustments in the tree or select a different tree in order to find a saddle that will match your horse's back.

The second key to saddle selection is to fit the rider. Each saddle has a different length of seat depending of the size of the rider and desired placement in the saddle. The width of the seat will determine how wide your legs are and make you more or less comfortable on this horse. The pocket will determine where you sit in the saddle. Pockets can be anywhere from the front, middle or back depending on the padding and shape of the seat of the saddle. Reiners tend to sit in the back of the saddle to be a little further way from the action of the front legs. Cutters sit more in the middle of the saddle and equitation riders will sit to the

middle to the front of the saddle in general. The stirrups should hang about the middle of the seat so that the rider's legs can be directly underneath him. A lot of cutting saddles have the stirrups hanging slightly forward in preparation of more stopping and turning. When selecting a saddle, riders should always sit in the saddle and find the proper position for their legs so they are comfortable and relaxed in the saddle.

The third criterion in selecting a saddle is to fit the purpose. Ropers obviously need saddles that have rigging that secures the saddle to the horse. Generally they will have a full rigging meaning that the cinch will attach at the front and the back of the saddle. Most regular riding saddles will have either 7/8 or 3/4 rigging which means that the front cinch attaches behind the swell of the saddle. Where a roper needs a very strong well attached saddle horn for roping, a cutter or reiner typically wants a smaller, lighter saddle horn in order to have more rider security when holding on. Barrel racers obviously want a lighter saddle usually with thinner leather. Typically their horses will have higher withers and so a little narrower gullet will fit their needs. Ultimately if we can select a saddle that fits the horse, the rider and the purpose then both the horse and rider can have a more comfortable and relaxed ride.

In selecting a saddle you should also look at the quality of the workmanship. The leather should be high quality, well oiled and all rigging should be attached firmly and appropriately for the purpose and use of the saddle. Always check all of the rigging for safety. The three most critical safety concerns when selecting a saddle or in maintaining a saddle is to check the cinches, the latigos on both sides, both front and back cinch, the stirrup leathers at the stirrup and up under the saddle and quick change devices used on the stirrups. Those are the areas of primary wear and use of the saddle and should be checked carefully on a regular basis. Saddles should be cleaned regularly and always wiped off when exposed to mud or water. Saddles

should be washed and re-oiled at least twice yearly.

By finding a saddle to fit the horse, rider, purpose and taking good care of the saddle, horsemen can have functional saddles that last a lifetime and provide comfort for both the horse and rider.

Dr. Clint Depew
State Horse Specialist
LSU AgCenter

How to Ride a Horse

What kind of title is that for a horse article! Everyone who owns a horse knows how to ride, right?

Listen to the problems most folks have with their horses, and I think you'll agree that most folks have big problems when it comes to riding. The exception is for ranch horses, or using horses. That is the key: the horse is used. It has a job to do. If we don't have a job for our horse when we ride, it will figure out that resisting us is its major job. This will be worse if it has lots of feed, and is kept in a stall with little or no turn-out time. Ranch horses are used hard, regularly. They learn to do whatever they can to conserve their energy. The same applies to kid's ponies that are ridden by a fearless 10 year old cowpoke who loves to go-go-go. They learn to rest as much as they can while Lil Roy is on a bathroom or snack break.

So how do I condense how to ride a horse into one short article? Basically, I can't, but I can give beginners a few ideas that might help to clarify the art of riding- what to do, and what not to do.

First of all, don't fall off. It seems to go without saying, but for many, that is the first challenge. Don't ride a horse you don't know. Make sure your saddle and gear is adjusted properly.

Next, go at a reasonable speed for the experience you have as a rider. Speed multiplies problems. If you can't stop at a walk, don't try to lope. Things will only get worse.

Next, ride with friends or teachers who will watch out for you and can help you. Take lessons, or spend lots of time in the saddle. Trot for extended periods at one time, like 15-20 minutes or more. That gait is excellent to get you in rhythm with your horse. You might think you're ready for Mardi Gras, but spend lots of time getting your horse prepared for all the excitement before you go on your first ride with a bunch of crazy people who have reduced inhibitions due to increased stimulant intake. Next, ride with a very small group of friends when you are ready to venture out of the pen, or away from the barn. Two or three is a good number. More horses equal more herd survival mentality. One snort can become an all out alarm when everyone's horse puts the hammer down on a trail ride.

Next, study, read, watch DVD's, RFD-TV, go to clinics, and find someone who has common sense about horses to be your trainer and mentor. They don't have to be a champion; they just need to be smart about horses. If they can't teach their horses with a sense of calm and confidence, how are they going to teach you what to do with yours?

Riding horses is an art. It can be simple, but it's not easy. It takes skill and practice to be good and safe. You ride with your heart, your body, your balance, your brains, and your energy. You are always trying to be in harmony with your horse, not working against it. You must understand that carrying the human body is a problem for the horse, most of the time. Turning, stopping, increasing or decreasing speed, backing up, stepping over things, crossing ditches, climbing and descending hills, and staying calm through it all takes a lifetime for a rider to master. Each maneuver or obstacle uses different muscles, positions, balance points, and rein/hand/leg coordination.

Each event requires increasing or decreasing energy levels to ask the horse to constantly adjust the life in its body.

Kids learn naturally while they are young. Adults have to really work at it if they start riding after they are mature. One of the best bits of advice I can give is for parents to teach kids how to ride at a young age. Start with a pony or older horse that has been used, a lot. After the basics, lessons can slow down, and the kids can just be allowed to ride for fun. While they're young, they'll learn a lot more in a shorter time period, naturally. They've got to have time to play. It's the fun stuff that allows the child to experience the freedom, confidence, and joy that comes from riding their horse. They can always practice being adults later...

Howard Cormier
LSU AgCenter Equine Agent

Horse Tips

❖ Leather Care

All my life, I have been told that if leather gets wet or you want to preserve it that you should clean it with soap and water, let it dry, and then oil the dickens out of it, especially on a saddle. I was told that you take neat's-foot oil and on the underside of the stirrup leathers and fenders, you put it on as thick as it would absorb. Why, I've even heard of people removing the sheep's skin under the saddle and dunking the entire saddle in a vat of neat's-foot oil. Maybe you have heard of similar ideas like this.

While visiting with one of the premier saddle makers in the country, a few weeks ago, he gave me some insight into the proper way to oil leather. He said that if you apply too much oil to leather, it will stop up the pores in the leather and it will not be able to breathe. He also said that if you put

enough oil on the leather that it turns black that you are essentially burning the leather and this will cause it to ruin and crack.

His idea as to the proper way to oil leather was after it has been washed with mild soap and water and let dry, take regular vegetable oil like you buy in the grocery store and take a paint brush and paint a light, light, light coat on the leather. He stated that you could paint this on the upper side of your saddle and after drying it would not rub off on your jeans.

My only concern was the fact that the vegetable oil might attract animals to chew on your saddle.

I don't know if this method works, but it makes sense and next time I am going to give it a try.

- ❖ Never underestimate the importance of doing ground work with your horse. The more that you can teach him to respond to or move away from pressure on the ground, the easier it will be to get him to respond to leg pressure when you are riding.

If you are interested in receiving this newsletter on a regular basis or know someone that might be interested, please contact your local LSU AgCenter extension agent or email me at cweisgerber@agctr.lsu.edu.

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