

CUTTING

The Beginning

- Cutting originated with American cowboys raising cattle on ranches.
- If a certain calf needed to be separated from the herd for branding, castration or medicine then a cowboy on a horse could 'cut' the calf from the herd and block it from going back.
- Soon competitions began to arise between the best riders and horses, and the NCHA (National Cutting Horse Association) was founded in 1946.

Today

- Cutting is now a big western sport that generates a large amount of profit, particularly in the recently prosperous selling and breeding of cutting horses.
- Typically Quarter Horses are cutters, having been bred for cutting. But you're also likely to see Arabians, Appaloosas and Paints.
- Cattle ranches aren't as common as they were, though the ones that remain still rely on cutting horses; but you typically see cutters only in the show pen now.

In The Show Pen

- In a cutting show the rider gets two and a half minutes to perform, which is typically enough time to work three cows.
- A herd of cattle will be on a back fence with a rider and horse, called your corner person, on either side of the herd to help push the cattle up when you go into the herd to make a cut.
- Your horse should enter the herd calmly and quietly, and you should have your hand up at this point, controlling your horse and which cow you'll go after.
- Once you've drawn a cow from the herd you drop your hand to your horse's neck and let him do all the work. In cutting you're really showing off the ability of your horse to read cows and move with the correct timing and position. Your job is to prepare your horse before you get in the show ring.
- That being said, it's not as easy as it sounds, even horses who have been cutting for years need constant training to keep them tuned up so they don't drop out of position. And even the best horse can have a bad day; the cattle always make it a bit unpredictable.
- You'll cut in a straight line in front of the herd, your horse mirroring the cow's movements as it tries to get back to its herd. Two other riders in front of the cow, called your turnback, will help push and turn the cow if it isn't very active.
- Your horse is judged based on herd work, controlling the cow, degree of difficulty, eye appeal, time worked, amount of courage and loose reins.
- You will be penalized for helping your horse cut, quitting a cow while it's still moving, if your horse charges/bites/paws at the cow, if you're out of position, if you lose a cow, if you switch cows, if you run to the back fence, or if your horse falls.
- You start off with a score of 70 and can drop to a 60 or up to an 80, though it's rare to see a 76 or 77 score. A 70-75 score is very good.
- Cutting has a variety of classes you could enter, ranging from ranch or green classes for new or less experienced riders or horses (depending on the class rules) to open and non-

pro. Depending on the class rules you might be able to two-hand or cue (usually only in the lower level classes for beginners).

For more information and videos visit the NCHA website: <http://www.nhacutting.com/>