

About Chris Cox

Chris Cox' entire life has been influenced by his relationship with the horse. He moved with his ranching family from Florida when he wasn't yet two-years-old, to an island off the coast of northeast Australia to raise cattle. During his time on the 100-square-mile Prince of Wales Island, and while he worked as a hand on numerous ranches on the mainland in the years that followed, the horse served as work partner, transportation, entertainment and even companionship for Cox.

"Being around horses has been as natural to me as breathing," Chris says in his book, *Ride the Journey*.

While Australia shaped the young Cox, it was with an eye toward returning to the United States that he honed his horsemanship skills competing in Pony Club, camp drafting (similar to working cow horse), and working for large ranches. He started his first colt in his early teens and went on to excel in his horsemanship studies at Longreach Pastoral College. His dream was to find a way to make a living working with horses - preferably in the United States.

At eighteen, he took the first step to fulfilling that dream and headed back to America. Following some ranch work in Florida, Cox began training mustangs for the Bureau of Land Management. Throughout the '80s and '90s Cox took in horses to train and began to devise what has become his trademark program - a step-by-step progression of skills for all levels of horsemen to improve their horsemanship.

His program has proved to be immensely popular with people of all ages and skill levels. It requires no gimmicks or special equipment but rather commitments to understanding the horse, devoting time, self-examination and honesty about one's own limitations.



At Road to the Horse in 2008 with fellow competitors Mike Kevil, Ken McNabb and Tommy Garland.
In 2007, Chris competed alongside Clinton Anderson and Stacy Westfall.

With his Chris Cox Horsemanship television show on RFD TV, the nationwide Come Ride the Journey Tour stops and appearances at equine expos and events, Cox has touched the lives of many a horse enthusiast and shown them there's a straight-forward, practical way to gain a better relationship with their horses. Those who saw him win back-to-back championships at the 2007 and 2008 Road to the Horse Colt Starting contests witnessed the effectiveness of his methods and his clear passion for horses.

2008 marked Chris' second consecutive win at the prestigious Road to the Horse Colt Starting Event. "I'm honored to be part of such a great event," says Chris. "I went up against some great competitors."

Cox is not only a successful clinician; he trains and competes at the highest levels of cutting horse competition. At his ranch he often has over twenty horses in training even as he juggles his demanding clinic, touring and competition schedules.

At his Diamond Double C Ranch near Mineral Wells, Texas, Cox offers progressive six-day horsemanship clinics several times a year. Chris also offers nationwide three-day clinics to make it even easier for those throughout the country to get first-hand instruction directly from him.

He and wife Barb welcomed their first child, Charlie Renee Cox in late October of 2008.

Training Philosophy 101

We've compiled here a few key concepts straight from Chris that are key to understanding his training program and his horsemanship philosophy - think of it as the Cliff Notes guide to Chris' teaching!

Ride the Journey: Life is a journey, and my journey is with horses. Come Ride the Journey is my way of inviting you to join my life, learn the lessons I've learned and continue to learn from the horse, and make the horse, to some extent, your life and journey as well. The journey lasts until the day I die, because the way I see it, there will always be something for me to learn from a horse or another horseman. Don't forget: the difference between good and great is passion. And I hope you'll share my passion for the horse.

Build Confidence through Knowledge: Self-doubt and fear are often based on lack of understanding or information. With horses, where confidence is a necessary ingredient for success, it's crucial to have both understanding and good information. That's what I offer in my program - the knowledge that gives you the information you need to understand your horse and help it to understand you. Through knowledge you'll gain the confidence both you and your horse need to establish a better relationship.

Keep it Simple: The less you need in the way of special equipment to communicate with your horse, the better. Think about it - horses don't use sticks or flags to get their point across to each other. Body language, posture, pressure, eye contact, personal space - these are things horses naturally understand and they're also the most effective in communicating with a horse. These are the things I rely on in my program to communicate with my horses.

Patience: There are no shortcuts to good horsemanship. You can't skip steps. And the lessons you are taught at a clinic or class need time to become a part of your natural way of communicating with your horse. That takes time and practice. When your patience does run out, with yourself or with your horse, you've probably hit the end of your knowledge. Be aware of this and make sure you have a reservoir of patience to tap into as you work to improve your horsemanship. Patience comes from believing in your program - you know it will work. Although I am not a naturally patient person, I have patience with my horsemanship because I believe in my program and know it will work.

Prepare Your Horse: I never ask a horse to do something I haven't prepared it to do. By the time I'm asking a horse to step on to a trailer, that horse has all the preparation it needs to do it. By prepare I don't mean desensitize. I don't desensitize my horses as much as a lot of people do. It's easy to overdo it and end up dulling your horse. It's okay for your horse to react to something, but if he's properly prepared he won't overreact.

Have a Plan: Each time you go out to work with your horse, have a plan of exactly what you want to accomplish that day. This will keep you working through a program with consistency. If you don't have a plan, time gets wasted, and you're likely to fall back on something you've already done and bore your horse, or move ahead too quickly not having thought about what your next step should be. Don't get up in the saddle and wait to see what happens. If you don't have a plan for your horse, the horse will have a plan for you.

Be Consistent: Whatever you do, be consistent. A horse values consistency because it can always be sure of what is expected. Mixed signals, different rules for different locations (in the stall vs. in the pasture), various handlers using conflicting cues - all lead to confusion and then resentment on the part of the horse. Remember, whenever you're handling your horse, you're communicating with your horse, so be consistent always. Many people change once they get in the saddle. You must be the same in the saddle as you are on the ground. Otherwise, your horse will react to the change in your behavior; it isn't consistent.

Soakin': When your horse has done something right, the best thing you can do is to leave it alone to soak up what has just happened. Just let it rest. You do this when the horse has accomplished the task with softness and give. If your horse is soft, it'll soak up the lesson because a horse's mind is like a sponge. When it's soft and pliable, it can soak up a lot. When it's stiff, it doesn't take on much.

Give Something Back: When your horse gives you something, respect its dignity by giving something back. You do this by rewarding an effort on your horse's part. Get in, be effective, then leave your horse alone. The best gift you can give your horse is the gift of relief. When the giving goes both ways, you'll have a fine partnership with your horse. If you don't provide relief to your horse he will find a way to get it.

Repetition: Repeating in small steps is a good way to help your horse to gain confidence and understanding. For instance, when you first put on a saddle pad, take it off again right away. Do this again and again until the horse understands that one

step and has confidence that it is a safe thing. The horse needs to understand that pressure doesn't last forever. He needs to understand that the saddle goes on, but it comes off too. He needs to understand that he'll go in the trailer, but he's not trapped and will be able to get back off. The repetition makes the step a part of the horse's library of "knowns," so that now that step can be built on without resistance.

Spice Things Up: Any horse can benefit from a change-up. Take a reining horse on a trail ride, jump your dressage horse, ride your trail horse around some cattle. New experiences engage a horse's mind and build confidence. If you focus too much on a single thing day after day, your horse may learn to resent it. Your horse can get sour from too much ground work. The horse is meant to be ridden and is a very purposeful animal. Your horse wants a job and purpose.

Body Reining: I prefer to think of "body reining" rather than "neck reining" because when I guide my horse I'm not using only the reins on the neck. Guiding involves my whole body (hands, shoulders, seat, legs) and my horse's whole body (neck, shoulder, ribcage, hindquarters) working together to move smoothly in the right direction and at the right speed.

Importance of Three: Much of my program revolves around three's - three seat positions, three leg positions, three steps in many of the exercises (three letters in my last name). I didn't plan this, it just seems to come up often enough when working with horses that I thought I should mention it.

To read more on Chris you can visit his website-

<http://www.chris-cox.com/index.shtml>