

WOODFORD PONY CLUB – PICKING THE RIGHT BEAST 2008

Picking the right beast is very important, as it could be the difference between completing the course and being cracked off.

The Beast you are looking for is one that firstly, has enough strength and energy to go around the course without stopping; and secondly will be placid enough that you can control it and draft it around the course.

Be aware of the wide difference in the temperament and controllability of cattle.

When you get to a competitive draft it will be likely different drafts of cattle will come from different owners, and each draft could be a different temperament. You should watch the draft contestants for a while to assess the temperament of the cattle, as some cattle are inherently more placid than others. Cattle are affected by weather, strength and nutrition.

If the cattle are either quiet or placid or are not strong and active you would look for an active beast that would complete the course. Don't pick a beast that is obviously weak.

On the other hand if the mood of the mob was nervous, active and strong, you would pick the quieter cattle in the mob. For instance, in a hyperactive mob, if a beast holds its head up higher than the rest of the mob, and moves its ears a lot; if it pushes boldly through the mob and pushes others out of its way; or if it puts its head down low and pushes strongly under the other cattle; if it acts nervously or hyperactive and it is scrambling around recklessly and jumping, it will probably gallop fast and be difficult to handle.

A shorter legged, big-bodied beast cannot gallop as fast as a long legged, trim bodied beast.

Be aware, a basic management principle is when a beast is confused about what it should go; it is much easier to control than when it has made its mind up that it is going to go in a certain direction.

As a general principal, some people call it the 45⁰ position, when blocking a beast it is most important you should be in a position where the beast is confused about which side of you is the greatest gap to get away. For instance if you are not in the centre of its line of vision and escape it will usually pick the side of you that it feels is widest to go through.

In both the camp and the course you often see a beast that isn't sure what is happening and can be controlled. But when it suddenly makes up its mind it is going in a certain direction it is far more difficult to stop.

Be aware that as you go towards or come around the first peg, some beasts may try to go back towards the other cattle.

Remember you can't turn a cow from behind; you must be fast enough to move up on its shoulder.

Ivan Wild