

Recommended Knives for Horsemen

Our topics for this week are::

- **Need for an ever present knife when working with horses**
- **Qualities of a useful everyday carry knife**
- **Facilitating access to an everyday carry pocket knife**

Ropes are essential tools for working safely with animals, particularly livestock and horses. They can save a handler's life or endanger it depending on the skill exercised in using them.

Egyptians began using ropes and simple knots to handle animals at least 6,000 years ago. Now, there are approximately 4,000 knots recorded, most of which were developed by sailors.

A famous knot in mythology was the Gordian Knot. Gordius was a peasant who became an ancient king of Phrygia, a section of the current nation of Turkey. He tied the yoke of his ox cart to a pole with a knot that no one could untie. Whoever could undo the knot was said to be destined to become ruler of all of Asia. When Alexander the Great came to Phrygia in 333 B.C. and saw the knot, he severed it with his sword. By the age of 30, Alexander ruled Asia.

“Cutting the Gordian Knot” is a phrase that means quick to make a decision in a difficult situation. Good animal handlers must, on occasion, cut the Gordian Knot, figuratively and literally. Quick knot cutting in an emergency is literal when animals become bound in ropes and struggle.

All horse handlers should carry both a cell phone for emergencies and a sharp, easily accessible knife for daily routines plus for emergencies involving a horse entrapped by a rope or tack. Multitools can be helpful in small projects, but they are bulky with poor handles for the small knife that is often included in the array of miniature tools. In addition, the knife steel in a multitool is inferior for sharpening and starting sharp. Even if you carry a multitool, you should have a separate knife you carry daily for cutting tasks.

A horseman's knife should be retrievable by one hand. This is possible with a fixed blade knife, but a fixed blade knife must be carried in an external scabbard. Retrieval is slowed by a restraining strap. The scabbard can catch on objects you brush against, and the appearance of a knife and scabbard can be intimidating to others.

A folding pocket knife is most suited for everyday carry, also referred to as EDC knives. You will not carry a big or bulky knife on a daily basis. For comfort and function, the knife should be a single drop-point blade approximately 3 inches folding pocket knife with a comfortable 4 to 4.5 inch handle.

Composition of the blade is very important. A good knife manufacturer uses named steel and stamps it on the blade. Some of the best blade steels are AUS8, S30V and VG10. Among the best knife brands are Benchmade, Spyderco, SOG, and Cold Steel.

I prefer a partially serrated edge for cutting thick ropes or leather. Serration will occupy about $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the blade edge which some feel is undesirable. However, serrations can be highly valuable in an emergency if that emergency does not occur at an optimum time in your blade sharpening schedule and you find your blade not sharp enough for the task needed.

Grind is how the blade is angled from the spine to the cutting edge. A full flat grind or a sabre grind are the best compromises between a blade's overall strength and cutting edge strength. The blade should have a strong locking mechanism to keep it open when deployed.

I prefer an assisted opening blade with a short tether that extends from the handler's pocket for quick retrieval, in case one of my arms is entrapped by a rope. Assisted openings use a spring to fully deploy the blade after a small push on a bar, called a thumb stud, on the blade. This is not considered a switchblade which opens on the push of a button and are illegal in many states. Assisted opening blades are particularly helpful if you have arthritis or injuries in your hands.

Your knife's handle should be smoothly contoured for hand comfort. It should have good traction, whether wet or dry. Handles made of durable synthetic material such as Micarta or G10 provide excellent grip, are strong, and resistant to moisture and impact. The handle should fill your palm and be shaped to your hand. It should sweep away from the handle core where it joins the blade to reduce the risk of your index finger sliding onto the cutting edge of the blade.

To be inconspicuous but readily retrievable, the pocket clip should slide onto the edge of the pocket and attach to the blade point end of the handle. This is called "deep-carry". meaning very little of the end of the knife handle should protrude from the pocket.

I attach a short tether made of rawhide lace to the clip end of the knife handle through the lanyard hole. After attachment to the handle and tying a stopper knot in the other end of the tether, the tether is the length of knife handle, about 4 inches. This further facilitates quick retrieval and reduces the risk of losing grip on the knife during deployment from the pocket.

Maintenance on a quality folding knife is low but important. As rules of thumb, an everyday care knife blade should be cleaned, sharpened, and wiped with a light oil at least once per week. Every month or more often as needed, the inside of the handle should be cleaned of dust, pocket lint, hay, and other debris and the pivot joint oiled.

A knife that is highly functional, easy to handle, and will serve you for decades will cost at least \$100.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Horsemen should carry a knife at all times for routine tasks and to be able to respond to emergencies involving ropes and a horse and/or themselves.**
- 2. An everyday carry knife should be a folding pocket knife with a single blade about 3 inches long.**
- 3. A horseman's pocket knife should be readily accessible by one hand which is facilitated by a deep carry pocket clip and a short tether lace or cord.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 250 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.