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ATTENTION: The News Editor

NAMIBIANS LEARN THE ROPES OF HORSEMANSHIP

A troop of horsemen and-women on horseback in a cloud of dust, surrounded by cattle and swinging ropes could easily have been mistaken for a scene on a farm in Texas. However, this happened right here at the Windhoek Show grounds from 30 August to 2 September, with the first Horsemanship and Roping Clinic brought to Namibia by Agra and Executive Equest. Agra, through Auas Vet Med and Executive Equest are suppliers of an extensive range of horse products.

For four days, a group of participants, under the hand of Iain Davis, learned the California or Vaquero style of horsemanship in the mornings and in the afternoons Iain taught the practical skills of roping. Iain is a buckaroo (cowboy of the Vaquero tradition of the Great Basin and California region, particularly one skilled in the handling of horses) and an educator, teaching clinics on horsemanship, roping, and low-stress livestock handling. Iain has worked on ranches in Texas, Montana, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Nebraska.

The goal of the California bridle horse training is the practical application of dressage principles, which involve learning to handle cattle by applying pressure correctly and from the correct angle in order to direct the horse with precision. This is important when working cattle from horseback, as it is to know how to rope in a way that is less stressful. In this way, cattle can get the attention they need promptly without the problems of driving sick or injured stock to a pen and head catch.

Another aspect covered during the clinic was the correct way of handling / driving cattle in the form of pressure and release principles on the cattle itself. This results in calm cattle and calves that can be driven over long distances without scattering.

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Clinic participants began with the basics of rope handling and various loops, through familiarising the horse with the rope, and into the actual roping of cattle. Groundwork techniques for handling roped cattle were extensively covered, as well as the unwritten rules of Vaquero etiquette.

Dawie Oosthuizen of Agra and Rian du Toit of Executive Equest are very happy with the success of the workshop, but more so the participants and spectators. Everybody involved requested such an event for the following year and Iain volunteered with great enthusiasm to come and give a clinic on “colt starting” (training young horses) and horsemanship. Though there was a lot of skepticism about the practicability of these techniques on the farm, participants are convinced that it can contribute to low-stress livestock handling and are eager to try it on their farms.

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Issued By:

Albé Snyman
Officer: Communications
Agra (Co-operative) Limited
Tel: (061) 290 9273
Fax: (061) 290 9250
Email: albes@agra.com.na
www.agra.com.na

Contact person:

Di-Anna Grobler
Manager: Marketing
Agra (Co-operative) Limited
Tel: (061) 290 9218
Fax: (061) 290 9250
Email: diannag@agra.com.na
www.agra.com.na