

Stolen Horse Nightmare

Your worst nightmare has come true. Your horse is missing.

Calm down and breathe. First, has he gotten out of his enclosure and maybe just strayed?

Look for physical signs—a downed fence, open gate or hoof prints heading out the driveway. Search the area and contact your neighbors.

Pay special attention to other horses in your area as it's common for people to put stray horses into the nearest enclosure.

Depending on the population density in your area, spread your search appropriately, as horses have been known to travel quite a distance in a short time.

Still no luck? Check with the nearest Livestock Identification Services brand inspector to report your horse missing and determine if they had a stray matching your horse reported captured.

Next, check with your local RCMP detachment to see if someone has reported a captured stray and if not, advise them of your missing horse, and the possibility of it being stolen.

Go back to where the horse was kept, because it's time to go to the next level of investigation.

Do a detailed search of the area, looking for signs that do not belong. People that are familiar with the area can detect signs that something is out of place. Look for tire tracks not belonging to your vehicle and in areas you didn't drive. Do the same with hoof and boot tracks.

Is there anything left behind—clothing, tools or

anything that would have fallen out of a vehicle or trailer? There have been crime scenes where a wallet has been left behind by the culprit.

Has there been any physical damage done to fences, locked gates, windows or any other property? The police will need to know about any physical damage found.

Check with neighbors. Hopefully, you're in a Rural Crime Watch area and all strangers are monitored. Ask if they observed any strangers around the area. If anyone stopped to ask directions, to use the phone or any other unusual behavior.

Follow the above steps and, taking everything into consideration, make a decision if your horse has been stolen. If you believe your horse is stolen, report it to the police and brand inspectors. The police are responsible for the criminal investigation, and the brand inspectors for detection during their inspections. The brand inspectors will advise all other inspectors in Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Alberta in their fanout system.

If your horse was branded, the chances of recovery are good. We've experienced several times now where once the thief realized the horse was branded, they dropped it off on the side of the road and left it.

The police will require a statement, in which a description of the horse is required. The police will want to know who has been around your property and horses. Not only livestock, but in other property thefts, the thief usually has some connection with the crime scene.

I hate to say it, but farriers, prospective buyers and associates have been responsible

for thefts. When talking horse theft, there's a good chance a thief has some knowledge of the horse prior to the theft. People living along a well-traveled road or highway is sometimes the exception.

Again, I cannot emphasize the assistance that a brand will be for investigation purposes. If photographs are available, supply copies to the police and brand inspectors. If the horse is branded, it will be detected when sold at public auction, feedlot, packing plant, exported out of province or checked on the highway.

I would also suggest preparing a poster and forwarding it to auction markets, tack stores and other horse-related businesses.

All thefts are unique and have to be handled that way, but I hope this will provide some guidance if your horse goes missing.

Branding Horses Is Important

Ever tried describing your horse to a stranger or a police officer with enough clarity that it could be identified? Hopefully, you will never experience it, as it's almost impossible.

RCMP Livestock Section recommends horse owners obtain a registered brand and freeze brand their horses. Hot branding is a well established method of permanently marking livestock, but it is not as obvious as a freeze brand. Brands can be obtained in Alberta from Livestock Identification Services. The cost of a brand is a small price to pay for the security it provides.

The experienced thief knows the freeze branded horse is easily recognized. Anything short of locking him up inside a barn would mean someone would spot him and notify authorities. One must realize a branded horse can be identified from a half mile away with a good pair of binoculars and from a vehicle driving past at eighty kilometers per hour, if the animal is alongside the road.

There is the added security that all livestock sold at public auctions, going into feedlots and packing plants or transported out of province are inspected by brand inspectors.

If the horse has been reported stolen and is branded, the brand inspectors will identify it as stolen and seize the horse prior to the horse being offered for sale.

A lot of horse owners do not realize the protection that is afforded them when a horse is branded with a registered brand. Every time the horse is brand inspected and the person who has possession of

the horse is not the registered brand owner, that person must produce bills of sale proving ownership back to the registered brand owner.

There have been incidents where the horse was recovered by brand inspectors before the owner became aware it was stolen. Also, when a horse is identifiable by a brand, a record is kept by the brand inspector, thus creating a permanent record. This is a serious problem for a horse thief.

Let's take a look at two separate incidents of horse theft that occurred in Alberta over the last year. Both were investigated by the RCMP with the assistance of Livestock Identification Services brand inspectors.

The first is a theft of two unbranded well broke geldings near Brooks. The two horses were stolen from their stalls over the weekend. Brooks RCMP detachment, with the assistance of other police services, had conducted an extensive investigation with inquiries made as far away as Ontario. The owners have published photographs in horse and livestock industry magazines, placed posters all over Alberta and alerted brand inspectors in Alberta, Saskatchewan and B.C. Unfortunately, the horses have not been located and the trail grows colder every day.

The second example is a branded mare and foal from the Fort MacLeod area. A mare and foal were brought into an inspected feedlot near Fort McLeod. Because the mare was branded and the seller was not the registered owner of the brand, the seller had to provide documentation proving ownership. Documentation was provided, although questionable in nature. The brand inspector, being diligent, contacted the registered owner of the brand, by simply looking the owner up in the brand book. The owner was questioned about the sale of the

mare. Not only did her not sell the mare, he didn't even know she was missing. The mare and foal were recovered before the owner even realized they'd been stolen.

If a branded horse is stolen, a fanout bulletin is possible so people have something to look for. An electronic implant is not visible to the naked eye, and even with a scanner, one must have close access to the animal. The ultimate safeguard would be a freeze branded horse with an electronic implant. The brand makes it possible to find the stolen animal, and the implant would assist in the identification, saving the owner the trouble of traveling to where the animal is located.

Livestock owners must be aware that all brands applied to livestock must be registered with the appropriate service responsible for the inspection in your respective province.

It is illegal to design and apply a brand without properly registering it.