

Identifying Your Horse

You know your horse by his appearance, attitude, and behavior. However, if your horse were stolen or lost, would you be able to positively identify your horse to the satisfaction of law enforcement and animal control officials? Horse industry officials estimate as many as 40,000 horses are stolen annually in the United States.

Methods of horse identification include hot iron branding, freeze branding, electronic ID (EID), and documentation of appearance and markings by drawings or photographs. Each method has its advantages and drawbacks to consider including ease of application and ease of alteration.

Hot branding is one of the best methods in that it is easy to observe and difficult to alter. However, the horse may object to the procedure and the owner incurs the expense of buying a unique branding iron. Freeze branding is another readily visible method but, again, an iron must be purchased and the brand can be easily altered. Lip tattoos are used for Thoroughbreds, but they fade after 4-5 years.

Electronic ID (EID) is now available in the form of a tiny microchip with a unique code which is implanted in the nuchal (neck) ligament of the horse. EID is difficult to remove, even with surgery. It is read with a radio frequency scanner.

For theft protection, the ideal situation is to combine a visible brand with EID. Brands should be registered with a state livestock department or with the County Records Clerk. The EID is registered with the manufacturer and the servicing veterinarian. Our clinic is offering the EID with chips from AVID.