

## **I Get a Quarter Horse** *(The Story of Cerveza)*

Patty Kent called my wife and said that she and Eddie were laying over a load of Quarter horses they had bought at an Oklahoma sale. Knowing that I was looking for a horse to trail ride, she told Renee they would be in Columbus, Ohio, at a Cutting Horse trainer's barn, for a few days. Renee, Lindsay and I drove down the next afternoon. The stable took what I always preach, "form to function" and carried it to new heights. From the moment we pulled into the driveway you could tell this place was stripped down for action with no frills or fancy stuff. This was a real cowboy's working barn. I straightened my cowboy hat and tried to stand a little taller as we walked into "Marlboro Country". The "lounge" had an oil heater, a few empty longnecks for decoration, some beer cases for furniture and the smell of "cow" for atmosphere. As we stepped into the arena we were greeted with the real thing, a man, a horse and a calf. I watched in awe as the horse bent, weaved, stopped, spun and sometimes got so low to the ground that the man's feet nearly touched it while keeping this calf away from the 15 or so others in the dust colored arena. The theme from "Bonanza" and "Cowboy" were starting to run out of my every pore!

When he saw us, he backed the horse up, turned, loped over to us, stopped on a dime, and swung off the saddle in an effortless motion. He actually said, "Howdy" We exchanged pleasantries and got down to the reason of our visit. "I got 5 horses here that ain't spoke for," he said. Sure enough there were 5 tied to a rail, all tacked and ready. "Eddie said the bay mare would probably be right up your alley as she is pretty good broke. She's a' coming ten, won some little money at Ft Worth as a three- year- old, they kept her fat with babies until this year. She bleeds San Peppy, got a real good handle with a lot of cow in her and I rode most of the rough off'n her 'bout an hour ago." I am not sure I understood the particulars of what he was saying but I got the general idea. "She looks good to me," I said. He said, "Alright then pardner, why don't we put you up?" Already we were bonding like real cowboys, he called me Pardner! I nervously got up in the saddle and while he was putting spurs on my new Shepler's Tony Lama, smooth Ostrich boots, and helping me adjust the Ox-bow stirrups, he was giving me my instructions. "Now, what you wanna do is ride this old girl at a quiet walk over there to that bunch of calves." He pointed in their direction. "When you done picked one you like, jus point her to 'im and drop yore hand. Let

her do the rest. When you get tired of that one, jus raise yore hand and hunt you another and do it all over.” Having, long ago, learned how important it is to follow instructions, I was ready and I moved toward the calves about 50 feet away. I saw a straggly one, pointed the mare at it and dropped my hand.

It was a loud but patient “Whoa, just a second” that I heard coming from the cowboy. He “moseyed” over. “Mr. Lavery, I see you remembered the part about walking over here and pointing her at the calf, but the part where you drop your hand is very important.” “I dropped my hand.” I said defensively. “Well you did put it down some all right but what we’re want’n, is yore hand laid right on this part of her neck” He moved my hand to her wither. “Okay, now I understand.” I said as I started back to the calves. I found another and pointed the mare at it. I made a huge point of dropping my hand to her wither. I felt her start to tense, I was ready. “Whoa, whoa, whoa,” this time a little louder. “Jus a second. Now that was good how you dropped yore hand but I see you trying to rein her a little. You just drop yore hand and don’t move it, don’t try to steer.” I sheepishly replied, “I just thought I’d help her a little.” “Mr. Lavery,” he said, “She don’t need no help.” I moved towards the calves again. I pointed her at one, I buried my hand into her wither, she squatted some and ducked to the left so fast I damn near fell off but I was doing it, I was cutting. “No, no, no!” I could tell he was no longer a happy camper as his voice was now an octave higher. “You are squeezing her with your legs!” “Well hell yes” I thought, “How else am I supposed to stay on when she ducks like that?” Realizing that this was the third time I was being corrected in a little more than 30 seconds of actual riding, I kept my mouth shut. “You got to push yore legs forward towards her shoulders and off her side so you ain’t giving her no cues with yore spurs.” I lied, “I understand,” as I rode off.

A little Angus calf caught my eye and I pointed the mare at him, I pushed my legs forward as I dropped my hand with a knuckle-bruising thud to her wither. She squatted down and jumped first to the left and then back to the right, putting that calf where she wanted him. It was the most unusual feeling I had ever had on horseback. I was holding the saddle horn tightly to stay on when his voice, now at shout volume, cracked the air again. “Mr. Lavery, stop a second. Look sir, (no more pardner) you seem to be hanging on the saddle horn.” “Duh!” I thought. “That is not the way you do this. What I want you to do is push on the horn instead of hanging on it. Push it hard enough that the W’s on your Wranglers are tight against the back of the saddle. Do you understand this, sir?” My wife and daughter are pretty much

in hysterics by now but they had the decency to be hysterical, quietly. “I think so.” I replied, “You want me to walk over there, point the horse at the cow, drop my hand with the reins so it is useless, raise my legs towards the horse’s shoulders and away from her sides so I have absolutely no leg contact, and instead of holding the damn horn you want me to push on it while this mare is moving left and right like a cat on fire and in the meantime you expect me to not fall off?” “Now, you got it, Sir.” I started back to the herd.

I pointed the mare at a little red calf and did everything, no matter how foreign or uncomfortable, the cowboy had told me to do. For the next 20-30 seconds, it was the thrill of my life as she bobbed and weaved, squatted and ducked completely on her own. I was just a passenger and one that was nearly falling off, as well. She was in control and her mission was to keep this calf where she wanted him. I am certain I was not a pretty sight but I stayed on and when I raised my hand the ride was over way to soon. In just about 1 minute, total, of riding, I was hooked.

I rode over to them, stopped and tried to emulate that effortless dismount I had seen Cowboy do but my left foot got stuck in the Ox Bow and it was not very successful. “Would the Mrs. like take her for a spin?” he said. Renee immediately volunteered our daughter. My heart sank. After being corrected about every five seconds and knowing how stupid and awkward I had looked, Cowboy was now about to put 13 year old Lindsay, perhaps the greatest juvenile, English, rider of the times, up on the mare so I could look even worse. I wanted to crawl in a hole. He gave her the same speech and stopped her within 15 seconds. I was secretly thrilled but only for a moment. He corrected her leg or some such thing and then she continued. He did not stop her again and although she did not look very comfortable either, she did a much better job than I.

When she was done, Cowboy gave us his impressions of our equestrian abilities. “The little girl has a lot of natural ability. She caught on real quick and could learn to be good at this in no time. I can tell she has done a lot of riding.” He turned to Renee, “Your husband, on the other hand, don’t have much natural talent but I must say I am really impressed with how well he did for never having ridden before. If you got him some riding lessons he could probably ride a horse like this, one day.” John Wayne never had a day like this! I was humiliated. I thanked Cowboy and sulked off to the car.

The girls made the ride home easy, as they never mentioned how poorly I had performed. Instead we talked about what a nice mare she was and how she would probably make me a good horse. (They never mentioned riding lessons) They asked me if I really liked her and I told them what a thrill she had been. My birthday was coming up and just before we got home Renee informed me she had purchased the mare as a gift for me. I was excited. I was thrilled. I was going to be a cowboy.

She arrived a few days later on a 6 horse stock trailer with 11 head on board. She was scrapped, bitten and cut in a few places and from the looks of the others on the trailer, she gave as good as she got. I doctored on her and put her in a stall in the show barn. Over the next week or so, I wormed her had some plates put on her and had the boys clean her up. Now here was odd thing, it was difficult to get any of them to clean her up. I realize she wasn't a show horse, wore no tail-set and certainly did not look like the rest of their charges but that was no excuse. When I asked for someone to get her ready, I never had any volunteers. Occasionally, I just got tired of waiting and got her ready to ride myself. I guess they just figured they would rather "rub" show horses than fool with this new "misfit" that wasn't going to any show.

Our riding sessions were progressing wonderfully as I learned about her and she about me. Her registered name was Lucy in the Sky. I was amazed and pleased how very light she was in the bridle. She could spin endlessly, from a canter slide 5-10 feet to a stop, side pass clear across the arena and when asked to back, nearly run in reverse. Needless to say I was impressed and in awe of the training she had received. She did however, on occasion, get a little ahead of me. Well, not a little, a lot. I finally understood what Cowboy had meant about "riding the rough off" in her". She could get pretty stirred up. When startled or if I made some mistake, she could run off. I felt some of this came from my balance not keeping up with her quickness thus causing me to get "into her mouth" too much. Now that I was a "real" cowboy, I purchased a wonderful Bosal with Mecante reins in attempt to remedy the situation. Over the next week or so, working very quietly, Judy and I began to develop quite a rapport. I learned to feel when things were about to explode and how to gently talk her out of a bad behavior. At last, I felt worthy of such a fine tuned horse.

Dave McDonald DVM is as nice a guy and as good a vet as you could ask for. With over 60 head on the farm, Richlon was on his list as a once a week stop-by. Dave handled our breeding program and since we wormed

monthly, and inoculated at least twice a year, he was on top of that, as well. He also dealt with most of our soundness issues. Lest I forget to mention, he was one of the founding members of the Ohio Quarter Horse Association, helped start the Quarter Horse Congress and as he had told me several times, was nearly born on a Quarter horse.

Word, of course, had gotten out around the horse circles, about my new horse, so I was not surprised to see “Mr. Quarter Horse” walk in the arena one afternoon while I was quietly working Judy.

“So you finally wised up and got a good horse!” he said.

“Guess so, I really like her but it is very different from what I am used to and it is taking me some time to learn about her.” I replied.

“Let me take her around once and I’ll show you some tricks.” I got off and began to explain about the Bosal and the long Mecante reins and about what I had been doing and how she could get a little tense. Before I could finish, he swung up to the saddle like he was a kid, took those 6 ft Mecantes and slapped them left then right across her flanks. She took off like a rocket to the other end of the arena. Wow, I thought, Dave really does know how to ride these things! At the far end he reined her into a circle, at a dead run. Another circle, with a flying lead change, in the other direction. Wow, I was impressed. I think it was about here when things went a little sour. Judy stumbled but she was so agile she came up still at a dead run. The only problem was Dave had lost his stirrups and half of the Mecante reins.

Our arena was 220’x40’. The stable area was about the same size with 30 stalls facing each other. The entire show barn was sort of in the shape of a “U”. (See picture on Bio page) From the aisle of the stall area you entered the arena through a 12’x60’ “chute” that opened on the straightaway near the end of the arena. In that very same arena, I had worked countless very fast gaited horses. I had worked some great road ponies and Road horses in there, as well. Never, no never.....had any covered the distance from one end to the other as rapidly as Judy and Dave! They were just a blur on the wall the “chute” emptied into. Now, I had never seen anything like this, without slowing down, Judy made a 90- degree turn into that chute.

Remarkably, Dave also made that turn. At the other end of the chute was the 14ft wide barn aisle, which one would have to go left or right at or run smack into a stall door. Running as fast as I could I got to the ‘chute” and saw that they obviously had made that turn as I could not see Judy. The ceiling in the barn was 12ft. As I looked a little harder, I noticed, first human legs and then a body slithering down from above the stall door and

onto the sidewalk where it just slumped and lay there motionless. **I had killed the vet!** I ran to him as he was sitting up. He was dazed but still had a sense of humor as we wiped the blood off his nose. “I hope you were able to learn something from that”, he said. Now that I knew he would live, I informed him of the “Laverys’ Law” that says anyone who falls off a horse buys the grooms a case of beer (cerveza). Judy, none the worse for wear, had returned with great speed to her stall and was quietly munching hay from the hayrack. She almost looked as if she were proud of herself.

Several great things came out of this incident. Dave is still alive and will probably never again hit a strange horse with Mecante reins. I learned that Judy could turn even sharper than I once thought and could go faster than I ever wanted to. I gained a great deal of respect for this mare, which has enabled me to do things with her over the next 15 years that many cannot believe. She is always available as no one else wants to ride her. The boys changed Judy’s name to Cerveza and from that day forward they were all only too happy to get her ready on the off chance they might get another case of beer. (Which, they did on a few more occasions)