

## Ridgeview's Magic Colonel

The first time I ever laid eyes on him, he was racking and trotting up and down the infamous "Red 50 yards" of the Tattersalls spring sale. He was very thin, didn't go very high, his coat was dull and his hair was very long. A darn good young trainer was riding him, a trainer who usually had horses in much better condition than this. This usually is a "tell" that a horse probably is not a good horse to bid on. Yet there was something about this horse. You could tell that, shed out, he would be a deep red chestnut. His tail and mane were flaxen and accented the red color. He was extremely long necked and high headed with what appeared to be a wonderful mouth. He seemed to do all the gaits easily and correctly, although not spectacularly. Most importantly he passed my one acid test, he had a beautiful and kind eye.

I had not been married very long and although my new wife was a wonderful horsewoman, most all of her experience came in another discipline, Morgans. She could drive a Harness Horse to perfection and show the hell out of a Walk Trot horse but she was not yet comfortable with a Gaited horse. As Magic Colonel continued up and down the Red 50 yards, the light bulb went off in my head. Long an advocate to the adage a husband can't teach his wife to drive a car, I was certain this probably held true with riding gaited horses. Even though I was breaking one of my longstanding rules by not talking to the consignor before bidding, I lit a cigarette, my secret signal to bid, and I was now "in". How brilliant I was, I would buy this big kind horse and give him to my wife to work and she would learn about gaited horses. A glance from the ring man told me I was "out". I lit a new cigarette and the 11-year-old gelding was mine as Count nodded to me and yelled "Yup!"

My wife was thrilled with her gift....I ....was a star! I explained the ground rules where she would work this wonderful, kind gelding on her own and I would watch him whenever she asked. In the meantime, I would use all the tools at my disposal, worming, floating teeth, high protein feed, alfalfa hay, vitamins and minerals, to get him in show shape for her.

Several months went by during which the horse's condition improved daily. Also, during this time, I tried to learn about his history. I found, that as a four year old, Bill Otto, won the Jr. Five Gaited Championship at the American Royal and he was outstanding. The great Arthur Simmons

purchased him and appeared to have owned him 3 years with no real wins and surprisingly, as Art sold more horses than anyone, not selling him for such a long time. Eventually he was sold to another great horseman, Ray Pittman who also owned him a number of years with similar success or rather the lack of it. Our farm name, Richlon, appeared next on his papers.

All along I had enjoyed my wife's smile and her comments on "how great he was today" as she returned to stable after working her horse in the arena. I marveled at him myself as his coat of hair now glistened with the most beautiful red color I had ever seen. His tail feathers were thick and beautiful. After several shoeings, his feet looked wonderful and he was using his legs better. No longer was he gaunt and thin. He was robust looking with chiseled muscles most everywhere.

As I look back, it seems my wife's smile and comments of his greatness seemed to become less and less frequent, in direct relation to the improvement in Colonel's condition. One day she asked if I would ride him so she could see him. Now, our arena was 14 feet high. Within a very short time, Colonel, walking on his hind legs and with me holding on for dear life, he was clapping his front feet together as if trying to grab on to one of the roof trusses and he was coming very close to succeeding. When he came back down to the ground, I did, as well. I asked my wife if he had done this before. Her answer was "lately he has". ( So much for the kind eye test! ) There is an old Lavery saying or one that has been used by the family for years "Can't stand Prosperity". Here, is a prime example. I had taken an older horse, out of shape, not healthy or comfortable and "Rocked" his world with the finest of care, food, exercise and medications. He was feeling fantastic, strong and invincible, on the muscle, loaded for bear. I had taken what appeared to be a kind horse, made him feel wonderful and "prosperous" and turned him into an outlaw!!! Thinking that perhaps Art and Ray had similar experiences, thus explaining his puzzling show career, I began searching for the phone number of the one man to win major classes with this horse.

Bill Otto had a barn Fondulac, Wisconsin. Bill was an exceptional horseman however he was somewhat limited, as Bill's show string did not include many high priced horses. With the exception of one or two clients, like Ben Sadoff, who could buy the best, Bill had to make do, on an extremely tough

show circuit, with what he had. Showing against the likes of Tom and Donna Moore and Chat Nichols, North Ridge, among many others in the late 60's, was not easy. But make do he did as it was never an easy task to beat Bill no matter how "expensive" your horse was. Aside from being talented, he was a very nice guy, as I was about to find out.

I reached Bill at his barn and after several minutes of small talk, I got to the point of the call, my problems with Magic Colonel. "Mr. Otto" I said, "it seems you have gotten along with this horse better than anyone." Although a very quiet man he was not a very shy man when it came to horses he liked. He proceeded to tell of every class he had won with this horse and the number was substantial. After several minutes of listening, I told him that I had purchased this horse at the sale at which point he interrupted again and told me he could not believe this nice horse had ended up at Tattersalls as he had gotten \$25,000 (an obscene amount in those days) for him at the American Royal the year he won the Junior stake. He went on and on. Finally, I was able to explain the reason for my call. After giving him the entire scenario, I asked, "Did he ever rear up with you?" His answer, " Pretty much all the time when I first started with him." My heart sank. He then added, " But it was easy to get him over it." I saw a glimpse of hope. "You got to do it every couple of months or just when you think he needs it." Okay, okay I thought. "I always do this with one that gets light in the front" he said. "Oh, oh", I thought, "its going to be some secret he won't tell me." He paused a minute and asked if I lived close to a lake, his barn virtually backed up to Lake Fondulac. "No", I said. He said, "Well, your gonna need a lake if he is up to his old tricks again." "I'll get a lake!" I think, by now, I was shouting, "What do I do with it?"

"Well" he said. "It is so simple, you are probably gonna laugh. Put a really old saddle on him or better you can ride him bareback. You just ride the S.O.B. to the shore of the lake. Ride him up and down on the beach and kind of test him. When the B\*\*\*\*\*d starts to rear up, you just jump off and then pull

him on over into the water. Then just hold his head down under that water for quite a while. When he gets up he'll be so glad he didn't drown, it will be a long time before he tries that again."

"Thank you, thank you" I said most sincerely and at the same time excitedly. Now, I had a secret training technique that would solve my problems. I hung up the phone and began to think of all I had been told. Ride to the lake. Work on the beach. When he rears, jump off and pull him over into the water. Hold his head under. Then let the newly trained horse up. Easy, in fact I was vaguely remembering something my Grandfather had done when I was very young, with a bad horse. I remembered it had to do with water but I was pretty sure no lake was involved. Anyway it was the same principal. This was it, easy, my Grandfather had done something like it, what other options did I have left. But...I didn't have a lake. A couple of days later, while jogging him (he was fine in harness) another light bulb went off in my head! I knew where there was a lake, well, a pond that should be just perfect. I had seen it some time ago while trail riding. It was in a large broodmare pasture on the horse farm that adjoined mine, A.J. Andreoli's Reata Farm. I had found a "Lake"

Reata encompassed nearly 400 acres at that time. Standing there at stud were Desdemona Denmark and the very talented Wing Commander son, Danish Commander. Not to mention two Morgan Stallions, who would become famous foundation sires for the new "breed" of Morgans, Fleet Wing and Vigil March. Notable show horses such as The Challenger, Virginia Woolf and Radiance (sisters to Belle Elegant) joined the more than 60 head in residence. The farm had several breeding and training barns, fields of hay, oats and corn and many, many acres of great pasture. It was a showplace. More important to me, at that time, in a pasture about a mile from Reata's barns, about a half hour walk from Richlon, located in about a 50-acre pasture, was this beautiful pond that would be my training "arena". I waited several more days for things to be just right. Finally, it was about 75 degrees on a beautiful sunny day. I was quite ahead of the training schedule having turned about 25 and would have very few to work after lunch. When the boys went to lunch at 1:00, I got Colonel and put an old saddle on him. I didn't even brush him, as I knew he was going to get a "bath" very soon. I smiled at the thought. I bridled him and thought "Okay, final check list, old saddle, ride to the lake, ride on the beach, he starts to rear, pull him over, hold head underwater, new horse." I took a hold of the bridle and led him

out the door into the bright sunshine to the pond where his metamorphosis would take place. It only took about 20 minutes to lead Colonel to the pond. It was just as I had remembered it only a little smaller. The pond was nearly round and about 80 feet across. One side had a few Willows and the rest was pretty clear. The only drawback was there was no shore or beach, just a bank with about a 12-inch drop, straight to the water I did not think this would prohibit my getting him into the water and as it turned out, I was right. There was only the slightest rustle of the Willows. Some kind of bird was chirping. The Sun was bright and very warm. The location was so absolutely peaceful.

I positioned Colonel close to the edge and mounted. He stood motionless while I ran the instructions through my mind one last time, "ride to the pond, ride on the bank, he rears, pull him over, head underwater," I had it down perfectly. I squeezed him to walk forward and almost immediately he reared straight up in the air. Like the professional I was, I deftly and with great precision, pulled him on over and into the water.

Now, I think I have mentioned how peaceful it was standing on shore looking at the pond. Well, you have no idea how peaceful it was there under the water. My whole life, or at least the last few minutes, was flashing very gently before me. I could see the sun through the four-foot of water above me as I was lying on my back with Colonel lying on me. The instructions clearly stated I should hold him under water but nowhere did I remember him holding me under water as part of the program. Then, another damn light bulb went off. I had failed to remember perhaps the most important part of Bill's instructions, the part that had caused this snafu, the part that could spell success or failure even life or death, the part that said, "you jump off and then pull him over. My lungs were burning but I somehow tried to think of some pleasant thoughts. I want you to know you can't do that while your drowning. Oh no, instead I thought of my brilliance in coming here secretly. I thought of how many days it would take the Sheriff's Posse to find my body and of course how stupid not to remember all the instructions. My lungs felt as if they were going to explode, I was certain I had been in this position for over an hour, A fish swam by and I swore it was smiling (read laughing) at me. At that second I felt Colonel stir. For an instant the pressure was off and I tore myself away and to the surface to be greeted by the freshest air I had ever smelled. After a few breaths, I

realized that because of the way I had been holding the reins, I had been keeping Colonel's head under water and at the same time, I let go of the reins and he quickly scrambled to his feet. We must have sounded a weird chorus with my choking and gagging and his coughing and snorting.

The water was up to his belly. I mounted and this time he just walked quietly off as I urged him to the bank. Try as I may, I could not get him to raise his feet to the bank and get us out of the water. This, of course, was the horse that a few days ago could almost touch the 14ft high trusses in the barn with his front feet and now was having difficulty raising them to the top of a 12in bank. I urged him to the bank with the Willows. The water here was only up to his knees. I took a switch from the trees and with a little encouragement; he reared slightly and jumped up on the bank. (That was the last time he ever reared under our ownership) After a few minutes of just standing there, I turned him and we headed back to the farm. Glad to be alive, thinking how important it is to always remember all the instructions and most of all ....I was riding him home.