

## Dave's Crypt Orchid Stallion

Dave owned an 80 acre farm just south of us. Dave fits the classic image of a classic tall, lanky slow talking farmer. A good man, friendly, likeable and intelligent. He had been raised north somewhere around Foley. He had a wife and two young children at the time. They were nice people, Dave and his wife both came to sad ends and died young. That however, is not the subject of this story.

Dave thought he wanted a horse or two on his place so he purchased a fine colt. A beautiful animal physically but neither gentled nor trained. Colts are born with their testicles inside of their abdomen. Normally the testicles travel through the abdominal wall and then present themselves in the normal way when the horses are between one and two years old. That is not as strange as it sounds. The same process occurs within human males and most other mammals. The difference is that it occurs before birth. In fact the area where human testicles travel from inside the abdomen to outside is a weak spot where men most frequently have herniations.

Well, that is probably more than you wanted to know, isn't it?

If you have horses you don't want a stallion unless you intend to breed and reproduce horses. Mature stallions are frequently hard to control and can be troublesome and dangerous around other horses. There are plenty of examples of gentle stallions but that is not the norm. Colts cannot be castrated (changed from a stallion to a gelding) until both testicles appear outside the abdomen.

Dave bought this horse when he was less than a year old. He kept the horse until he was three years old and had grown into a strong animal. Nearly sixteen hands high which is a tall horse by many standards. The testicles never showed. Well actually one did but you need to get them both. This situation is not common but it does happen. The technical term for that condition is crypt orchid. With a testicle withheld in the abdomen there are two choices. You can leave the horse as a stallion but he won't be a good breeder. The testicles are normally outside the body for a reason. The viability of sperm is much higher in the exterior scrotum. It is cooler and the sperm live better. The second choice is an expensive surgical operation. The cost of the operation would have been much more than the value of the horse.

Dave did come up with a good solution however. He sold the horse to me for ten bucks. This all took place nearly 40 years ago so I cannot at this moment recall my exact thinking but I am pretty sure my thinking was flawed.

I'm good with horses so as time permitted I worked to gentle and train the stallion. Again, I don't recall all the details but I do remember that progress was erratic at best.

On the particular day that I am about to describe the horse was pastured with a herd of cattle in a ten acre field. I had just fenced this field with five strands of the brightest sharpest barbwire that Montgomery Wards had to offer. I had built the corners to hold up for years. Lots of cross bracing wires and extra posts.

It was a bright summer afternoon. I caught the horse, saddled and bridled him right there in the field. He was still pretty green and it is always easier to work a green horse in a confined space. At this point in his training the horse's most serious fault was that he liked to run and he was difficult to control at a run. I guess you could say he tended to run away.

We made a few laps of the field at different paces. He was getting warmed up and into a heavy sweat. That was fine. Then for a reason only he knew, he broke into a dead run. I wasn't particularly worried; in fact I nearly

expected it. We were in a big pasture and even when you cannot stop a runaway horse, you can almost always turn him. Not always, but almost always.

A useful definition of a runaway horse might be a horse that is traveling in a direction of its choice at a high speed and ignoring any signals the rider might be giving. Generally a runaway will hold its neck straight ahead and stiff. Even so, a strong rider who concentrates on pulling one rein only can normally force the horse's head to the side. A horse has a natural inclination to follow its head. If it does not follow its head, the running horse is seriously off balance. By my thinking, if you can get a running horse to circle he's no longer a runaway. He's just a horse running himself to exhaustion.

Dave's horse was exceptional in its ability to run away from its own head. We crossed the field diagonally, a distance of over ¼ mile in mighty good time. I spend all of that time, however short, trying to turn that horse. He was headed directly into the far corner. A corner I had recently built with plenty of good wooden posts, braces and lots of shiny barbwire.

I could have bailed out. Even at a dead run. I've done it before. You just need to pick a spot that is clear of obstacles like tress and boulders and you need to hit the ground rolling. It is going to hurt, but the theory is that it will hurt less than what that horse is taking you into.

Well I stayed with him. A big mistake. I just could not believe he would hit that fence at full speed with his eyes wide open.

A few strides before we reached the fence, I let up on the reins so he could clearly see what was ahead of him. He just didn't care. He didn't even consider slowing, swerving or jumping. He hit it head on and at full throttle.

I was mounted high enough so that none of the wires broke over me directly. Some of my wounds suggested that a wire fragment or two ripped across me as the fence blew apart but he took the great majority of the damage.

I held the reins in one hand so that I would still have control of him when we picked ourselves up off the ground. It didn't seem necessary. He wasn't dead and he hadn't broken any bones, but my fence did not come apart easily. He was covered with bloody slices. Given that he was equipped with horse hide, none of his many cuts was individually serious. Collectively they looked horrid.

We both caught our wind and shook ourselves off. I walked him back through the hole in the fence, made some temporary patches and limped home.

Now I know you're thinking that is pretty much the end of this story because both man and beast would have learned from this. Well, you're wrong. The next part of this story reminds me of that element of human nature that set Charlie Brown up to try for a place kick with Lucy holding the football every fall.

Later that same summer, Walt, a new neighbor was surveying for a 20 acre parcel on which he intended to build a house. Walt wasn't a surveyor by trade but if you understand the principles, can get some basic equipment and know where to find a starting place you can do a passable job of locating your property. There was a steel marker buried years ago by surveyors to mark the corner of the section where the east-west and north-south roads meet at the edge of our farm. Walt was using that as his starting point.

Walt had a few friends helping him; there is a lot of measuring and aligning to do. They were just getting their bearings when I rode by on Dave's horse at a good clip. The farm access to the Township road was U shaped

with two driveways. Something about Walt, his helpers and their equipment spooked the horse. Big surprise there, right? Instantly we are headed for the farm buildings at a full run. I stayed with him into the first driveway and tried to follow the U. There were buildings, trees and farm machinery to avoid but he was running too hard and couldn't follow the shape of the U. I mentally calculated that on our current course and trajectory we were going to hit the outside wall of the big pole barn head on.

We did exactly that. The horse never flinched, swerved or made any attempt to reduce the impact. It reminded me of another cartoon. Do you recall those Road Runner scenes where the coyote would paint an image of a road onto the face of a stone wall? It was like that. I think my body sort of slammed and slid upward and the stallions body covered the wall left, right and down.

I don't really recall what occurred immediately after that. I suppose I was a little groggy. Some years later, Walt told me that he and his friends saw the action and were about to rush to my aid. My son Joel who was about six years old happened to be talking to Walt at the time. Joel always was a friendly and gregarious kid. Anyway, Walt told me that Joel proudly said, "Don't worry, that's my dad, he's ok." That caused me to reflect that I must have been doing too much of this sort of thing.

A few weeks later a guy was delivering fertilizer for me and mentioned that the market for horses was good. He liked handling horse and he had a truck. He offered to pick up Dave's horse and deliver him to the Sale Barn for ten bucks on the next auction date.

Well, he did that and called me a short time later to tell me there had been some issue with the horse at the auction and he only brought eight dollars. That left him two dollars short of the ten that I owed him for the hauling. He was a decent fellow and said he's let me off for the two bucks.

Seemed like a mighty good deal to me.