

A Man Can Stay Too Long on a Bucking Horse

A Two Part Story.

This is the Horse Part.

It was the Friday before my 49th birthday.

I took the day off and spent most of it working around the farm.

About midafternoon, I saddled my mustang stallion.

It was spring and a good day for a ride.

I bought this mustang from the Bureau of Land Management two years earlier when he was five years old.

Five is older than ideal to start work with a mustang.

A horse that has lived that long in the wild will have done a lot of fighting and will have developed a harem of his own.

Those experiences will make a horse more of a challenge to gentle and to train.

I had pretty well tamed this horse and trained him to ride and drive.

He was in most ways a decent horse but from time to time some of the things he learned or experienced as a wild horse in the rough lands of Nevada would come through.

For example, it is difficult to get him to pass through the two tall upright posts across the entrance to the farm. The posts reminded him of the corral entrance that he was driven through when he was captured.

On more than one occasion he furiously destroyed a garden hose in the farmyard.

I assume he thought it was a rattle snake.

He had a great sense of dignity.

He demanded respect, and he would attack and knock down any of our geldings at the slightest provocation.

He clearly had a lot of fighting experience.

He could defeat any horse on the farm in seconds.

This horse has a color pattern that is commonly described as gruella.

That pattern is black mane, tail, feet and with a black dorsal line over the backbone.

Gruella is a classic mustang pattern although the base color can vary.

A horse with the same pattern and a light brown or dun base color would be called buckskin.

This horse is classic mustang all around with the head shape of a Spanish Barbary horse, the original mustang bloodstock.

We named him Gruella.

I intended only a casual springtime ride around our farm.

I road north on the long driveway to the Township Road, traveled east on the Town road until reaching the County Road and then followed it south less than a half mile.

At this point I crossed the ditch into a forty-acre field.

The wind was from the north and we were now south of the farm and the main herd of horses.

That's when trouble began.

For no reason I could determine at the time, the Gruella started to buck.

He fought me hard and clearly wanted to run north toward the farm, without me.

I like to think that every time I work with a horse, I train that horse.

With that in mind it is important that the horse behave better in some way at the end of the ride than at the beginning.



There was no way I could let the horse have his way.
He bucked high and hard until we were both winded.
Then we fought each other for control until he caught his wind and started bucking again.
He did this over and over.
Many times, he came close to getting rid of me, but I was too bullheaded to let him get away with that.
The rider who says he's never been bucked off hasn't ridden enough horses, but I could count the number of times I have been bucked off on one hand, so I don't leave easily.
The horse was seven years old, a youth in horse years, I was nearly 50.
Eventually, after what was probably a half hour or more of these episodes of bucking to exhaustion, I decided he was going to win.
I wasn't going to let him know he had won, however.
I decided to drop him and get off as he fell.
Generally, you can drop a horse by pulling its head all the way back until it is against your knee.
If he persists in bucking or running in that position, he will lose balance and fall.
It is not a neat or pretty sight, but at least I could claim a win of some sort.
I had one hand on the horn and the left rein in the other.



Pulling hard on the rein tends to force you forward in the saddle.
My hand on the horn was there to push me back so I could keep a good position.
I did ride forward in the saddle, however.
Not far but my seat position was less than ideal.
At this point I was probably forward and loser in the saddle than I wanted to be.
He was still bucking and as I hit the saddle hard for what might have been the 300th time, everything from my waist on down seemed to blow up.
The instantaneous pain and heat were incredible.
My legs went limp.
I didn't know what was wrong, but I knew this ride was over.
The next time he went on a high rolling buck, I just took an exit over his head as he wound down.
I hit the ground in a roll to the right.
I've done that before.
Anyone experienced in falls knows how to roll so as not to break bones.
I rolled to the right.
If you give a horse a chance, he will do all he can to avoid stepping on you.
The next second I was lying on my back trying to figure out what I had busted.
The Gruella was gone.
It took a little time to catch my breath and get my bearings.
I did not get hurt by the fall.
The pain resulted from what I broke while I was in the saddle.
I have injured my back before, but this felt different.
I could move my legs, but not well and not entirely as I intended.
I rolled to my knees and stood up.
I could only move my legs if I pointed my toes together.
That's right, together, toes to toes.
That of course was farther than I could rotate my legs when I started this ride.
I was about quarter mile from the farmhouse with a pasture, a river, and a couple of fences between.

I walked until I reached the first fence.

I rolled under it and then lay on the ground for a time to catch my breath.

I was now in my wooded pasture with grand oak trees. I got up by pulling on a fence post and then resumed my walk toward home.

It was incredibly slow, and breath takingly painful.

When I reached the first oak tree, I let myself down to rest and steady my breathing again.

The pain was breathtaking.

I was surprised to see a woman I did not know rushing toward me from the direction of the county road.

When she reached me, she said she was driving by and met a horse running north wearing a saddle and bridle. She said she recognized it as a mustang from the freeze brand that the BLM puts on all mustangs.

Very few people would know that.

She seemed to be an intelligent woman who knew horses.

She asked if I was hurt and if I needed any help.

Of course I told her I was fine, just taking my time strolling home.

What else could I say?

I wasn't bloody and I didn't care to discuss injuries below my waist with a strange woman.

I didn't know what was wrong anyway.

Never did see her again.

Have no idea who she was.

After a rest I worked my way further through the pasture and when the pain got to be too much I rested at the base of another oak tree.

I know this is hard to believe but just then another woman showed up.

This woman I knew.

I had talked Gail into having a cleaning lady come in for a few hours each week.

Gail was working two jobs; it is a big house, and we could afford it.

Gail ended the cleaning service after some months because the precleaning she (Gail) felt she needed to do before the cleaning lady came was just too much.

Gail just couldn't tolerate the idea of the cleaning woman coming into a messy house.

I guess we all have our quirks.

Anyhow, the cleaning lady saw the Gruella run through the farmyard with a saddle and bridle on and came looking for me.

She found me leaning on a tree, and asked if I was hurt, and if I needed any help.

Well, you already know the answer to



that.

I told her I was fine.

Since she was done with her work for the day she left. I crossed the river on the wooden bridge.

Next, I reached the gate that marked the boundary between the pasture and the lawn.

The Gruella was standing on the lawn, courting a mare that was in the pasture.

Well, that explained why he went wild.

I had taken him out of a pasture north of the farmstead and when we rode south, he got downwind of this mare in heat.

Testosterone is a mighty powerful thing.

Horse romance is terribly rough and violent.

The courting process involves a lot of biting, kicking and screaming, both ways.

I suppose I wasn't thinking too clearly at the moment.

The Gruella was standing at the fence across from the mare still wearing his saddle and bridle.

I walked toward him thinking I should take the saddle and bridle off as long as I was passing by.

He swung into a pivot.

I knew what he had in mind.

I was barely able to turn and duck before his two hind hooves swept through the space where my head had been.

I felt the wind from his hooves.

If I had been wearing a hat, he would have taken it off.

A lot of men have been killed in just that way.

A horse kicking high and hard like that can smash a head like a pumpkin.

I kept right on moving toward the house, and I left him with his mare.

I needed to rest.

I called Terry and asked him to come over to put the Gruella away.

Terry is good with horses.

Standing was very uncomfortable for me.

I laid down flat on my back trying to figure out what was busted.

I don't have a good recollection of time; the pain was clouding my mind. I suppose it was about five o'clock.

Probably two hours since I went out on my ride. The walk home might have taken most of an hour.

Gail came home and seeing Gruella down in the east yard she walked toward him to catch him.

I yelled at her to leave the Gruella be.

Terry showed up soon and took care of the horse. Gail was a little alarmed to find me lying down.

I told her what I knew.

We decided it was probably best I get to a hospital.

For reasons I don't recall, we decided to drive to Methodist Hospital in south Minneapolis.

In hindsight it probably didn't matter.

The quarter horse, Misty, was the mare in heat.

The fine horse, Hawk, resulted from that mating.

That is the end of the Horse Part.

