

The Perfect Combination

by Kathy G. O'Neal

Several years ago, a client was looking for an English type horse, one with spirit and lots of class, and maybe a few show wins in his pocket. Searching the Internet, she found a bay and white double registered Pinto/Paint gelding named BB High Roller (alias Huey).

Huey captured our attention because of his size, conformation, friendly face and the intense way he observed the world around him. The breeder had shown Huey in the past, but had just run out of time for him. My client was willing to spend the time e-mailing information, videoing our facilities and convincing the breeder my training program was right for Huey.

All the while I was trying to convince her that this was a bad idea. "You don't know if this lady is telling you the truth. Why is he out in pasture if he has been shown before? Maybe he is not sound. Maybe he is a difficult horse to be around and you don't need that and frankly neither do I," I rambled.

My hesitancy was because I was recovering from shoulder and knee surgery and wasn't sure I was ready for this challenge. I seriously didn't know what my confidence was going to allow me to do. Questions swirled in my mind. Would I want to ride again? Would I physically be able to ride a horse that big? Was he really a well behaved horse?

Undaunted by my fear and negative comments, Huey finally arrived, and from that day forward our lives changed. The first time I rode him he was a little shy. I was not the braver of the two of us at that point. He was only the second horse I had ridden since my shoulder surgery. Slowly and quite steadily Huey accepted his new surroundings, the stable and its schedule, the feel of new hands at the reins, and the discipline of the rigors of training. All the while he began winning the hearts of all around him, including me. His tentativeness steadily disappeared and he accepted my authority in training, his step becoming quite sure, and his trust in me complete.

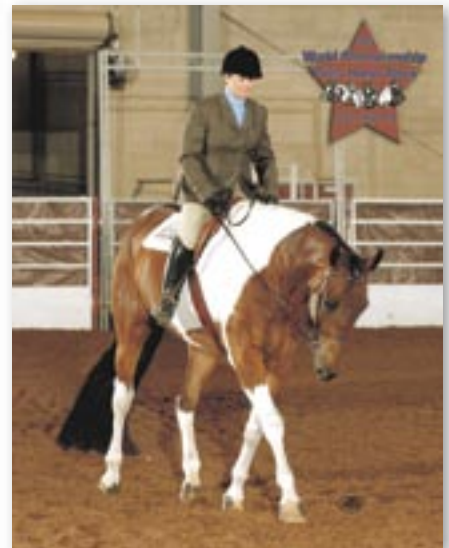
Early in our relationship, in our slow comeback of strength and condition, something happened to prove this horse was a "Keeper". I felt like I had been out to pasture, too, but it was only six months on the couch! Huey and I were still getting to know one

another and one day he tripped going across the arena. In my weakness, I folded forward and fell on his neck. He spooked sideways continuing to unseat me. Things seemed to go in slow motion as I looked at the ground and thought, "Oh no, here we go again, and I instinctively shouted, "Whoa!" Even with me hanging on by my right spur, Huey stopped dead still. I knew in my heart that this horse would do anything for me and my bond as a partner with him, back to health and beyond, strengthened. That sense of trust was a totally satisfying feeling.

Everyone loves Huey. My husband Andy, who doesn't like just any horse, the students who pet and talk to him before going to their own horse, almost anyone at the horse shows that sees him has to stop and chat with him. He wakes in the morning ready to be adored. When he's eating he will leave his food to make sure he gets an extra scratch on the face. He likes to have his chin scratched and his withers rubbed. He is tall enough that he put his head on my head while we were standing talking one day. He listens to the accolades of what a good boy he is and he's convinced his mission in life is to welcome one and all to his world. He is a remarkable animal who enjoys the training and competing aspect of his life, while at the same time, he teaches us how to love and trust one another.

Everyone who meets Huey has a different name for him. His huge size, 17.1 unofficially, seems to demand attention from all who see him, and after asking how tall he is, they in turn insist on their private name for him. One name is Huge, another Lurch, and a child called him the gentle giant. He reminds us of the large infant duck cartoon character, so we call him Baby Huey.

We found out quickly that Huey could jump. He had done some jumping, but we spent considerable time improving his style, and found him to be a very brave horse. He trusts me now over the jumps and... well, who would have thought I would be jumping



again so soon. He never questions me, and I tell him often he's a good boy, my friend and my partner.

As his training progressed we began looking for shows where we knew he'd do well. The long term goal was the 2005 Pinto World Show in Tulsa, Oklahoma. We made it to that show and Huey won Reserve World Champion in Discipline Rail, in a field of 22 horses. This is a command class; whatever the judges ask you to do you must perform. They asked us to perform a shoulder in, counter canter, forehand turn and extension of gait among other things. He was willing to do all with ease. Be assured this trainer was ecstatic.

Huey had the talent to do what I asked, he listened to me, he was agreeable, we were right, and he won. It was a beautiful feeling for both of us. He is a brave horse who has found for himself a most satisfying life. He rescued me from my self-pity about my shoulder injury, and urged me back into the show pen. He has the talent to carry the skills he's being taught, he makes the rider look good, and like a true athlete, he's intelligent and has the desire to do the right things. This amazing horse was a blessing for me and helped restore my confidence in myself and my God given abilities.

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