

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN HORSES FOR REAL

By Dave Ewert

While recovering from three major back surgeries over an eighteen-month period, I realized that I could not work as a commercial electrician any longer. I was saddened to give up a career that I truly enjoyed, but I knew I would require future cervical surgery with additional spinal fusions. Even more upsetting to me was the thought of losing my ability to ride horses, which was a passion of mine.

As depression set in and I tried to be realistic, I felt that I could no longer ride Princess, my Morgan mare and a heavy trotting horse. It was difficult to think of parting with Princess, but at the same time, I didn't want such a young horse just standing in the pasture all her life, especially with all my effort and hard work in training her. We had Tara, a nineteen-year old Quarter-Arab mare for my wife, Lynn, to ride. Tara was part of our horse family for many years.

One December day in 2009 as I was moping around the house, Lynn mentioned a rare breed of horse called the Rocky Mountain Horse. She pointed out that Rockies are supposed to be smooth-gaited riding horses. We knew little about them, but we both thought this was worth looking into. I started my search for information on the breed. I found the RMHA website and read about the history of the Rocky Mountain horse. I still wanted more information. As I continued my search, I ran across the book, Rocky Mountain Horses- A Rare Breed Indeed, by Bonnie Hodge. I mentioned the book to Lynn, and to my surprise, I received it the following week for my birthday in January 2010. Within a few days, I read the entire book. I paid special attention to Chapter One regarding the horse's motion which provides an extra measure of comfort for the rider. It was also very encouraging to read that Rockies are used for many therapeutic riding programs. I reviewed other sections of the book for points on purchasing a Rocky, and I then started spending hours every day looking at various websites to find the perfect Rocky Mountain horse.

It was hard to believe such a wonderful horse really existed. As our search continued, we were reluctant to believe everything we were told about Rockies. Because we live in southern Wisconsin, local breeders were few and far between, so I questioned myself. How much should we spend, how far will we have to travel, and who should we trust? After weeks of searching, making numerous phone calls, and visiting various breeders, we decided to take a trip to central Illinois. It was a cold Saturday in January when we met with a small breeder. He had a young filly just turning three years old and a gelding for sale. At first sight, the dark chocolate filly named Sundae caught my eye. As we conversed with the owner, it was obvious that he had great concern about what type of home we would provide. He asked questions regarding our facilities and the training methods we used. After he concluded that we could provide a good home for his filly, we discussed her pedigree and prior health history, then came to an agreement on the price. Although Lynn was apprehensive about training such a young horse, I had no doubt that I could train her, especially with the success I had in the past using natural horsemanship methods. I didn't want to miss this special opportunity because, in some way, I already felt a special connection to Sundae. We made final purchase arrangements, and two weeks later we picked up our first Rocky Mountain Horse.

A few days after Sundae settled in, I started doing some basic ground exercises with her. It was simply amazing how quickly she learned. During mid-February, I continued to work daily with Sundae, as weather permitted. We worked on sensitizing, desensitizing, and ground exercises with the introduction of tarps, engine sounds, water puddles, and any other objects I could think of. By early March, I introduced Sundae to a saddle and a bridle. It wasn't long before I was line-driving her down the road. The training I gave her was purposely slow, and I was careful not to take any chances of injuring my back.

Sooner than expected I realized Sundae and I were ready for our next step, and I started to sit on her a couple of minutes at a time. After a few days, we went on our first ride in the training pen. By early summer, we were hitting the trails. Sundae's confidence grew every day. Her gait was so smooth, and she was building speed. We gradually increased the length of our rides. Never once, after hours of long trail rides, did I ever have a backache. In fact, the forward and backward motions of sitting in the saddle were actually relaxing and comforting to me.

Rockies truly are everything they are known for! In my opinion, their disposition is unbeatable. What is simply amazing is their ease of training, how they handle different situations, and their beauty and smooth gait. The fact is: "Rockies are for real".

As summer went on, Lynn often mentioned how fortunate I was to find our "one in a million" Rocky. We had to pinch ourselves to remember that Sundae was a real horse, and not just a big, loveable, easy-to-train dog. It wasn't long before I suggested we look for another Rocky for Lynn to ride. Thus, our search started once again with visiting many breeders. Not finding exactly what we were looking for, I continued to check websites often for new listings of Rockies.

One evening, a story written by Bonnie Hodge in the 2010 summer issue of the RMHA magazine, [The Rocky Mountain Horse](#), caught my attention. The story was about Bonnie's mare, Cleo, a matriarch and a direct daughter of Sewell's Sam. This mare had quite the life's history. The article mentioned that Cleo produced a stud colt that spring, and something was so familiar about this foal. Then it suddenly dawned on me. Earlier, while searching for Lynn's Rocky, I had seen an ad on an Internet site for Cleo's 2010 foal when it was in-utero. After realizing how special the bloodlines were of Cleo and the stallion she was bred to, and the fact that the foal was 50% Tobe blood, Lynn and I began to fantasize. Wouldn't it be an honor and a privilege to own a colt with such a pedigree? It was exciting to think of the possibility of breeding our own Rockies some day.

Many thoughts ran through our minds while trying to fall asleep that night. For curiosity sake, I made a telephone call to Bonnie the next morning and to my surprise the colt had not been sold. His registered name was Nuncio's Ozark Hearts'aFire, but he was nicknamed "Kobe". Bonnie stated she was looking for the best home possible for the colt, and that she wouldn't be parting with him for some time. After several phone calls, emails, and conversations about who we were and what type of facility we could provide, Bonnie decided we could be potential buyers of Kobe. We decided to plan a trip to visit Bonnie in Arkansas once the weather cooled down.

Meanwhile, we continued to visit breeders to find Lynn's Rocky. On a trip to Indiana, we received an unexpected telephone call from Bonnie. She informed us that one of her friends in Texas was selling her Rocky broodmares with excellent pedigrees. We contacted the owner to inquire about these mares, and we became very interested in two of them. We decided that after visiting Bonnie, we would continue our trip and go to Texas.

In September, Lynn and I headed south with our trailer in great anticipation of this wonderful opportunity. After arriving at Bonnie's home early one evening, we visited and unpacked to stay the night. She asked if we would care to see her horses, and, of course, the answer was yes! As we approached her beautiful mares, they came to greet us, all looking for attention. Shortly thereafter, we proceeded to the other side of the property, saving the best for last. There was the stunning colt, Kobe, alongside his dam, Cleo, and his sire, Wildfire. This was an unbelievable sight for us- the entire family all together in a lovely pasture!

The next morning after breakfast, we spent a little more time with the horses and then left to continue our trip to Texas. We arrived late in the afternoon. The mares were more than we expected. With a vet inspection already done earlier that week, we purchased two beautiful mares that evening. Myra is a beautiful smoky black mare, a direct daughter of Maple's Squirrel, and is due to foal in the spring of 2011. Dora is a beautiful, buckskin mare with excellent conformation and pedigree. Both horses have the greatest disposition.

It now was the end of September. The horses had time to settle in for a few days after their long journey to our home in Wisconsin. After having their hoofs trimmed and another vet check, we discussed the possibility of training them to ride. Neither mare had been ridden since the time they were certified. So, I started from the ground up with natural horsemanship training, spending one to two hours daily. After only a couple weeks of training, I was spending time on the trail with them. As winter weather arrived, I decided to discontinue Myra's training due to her pregnancy, but I continued training and riding Dora, weather permitting.

In the short time I have experienced this wonderful breed of horse, I have found them to be simply remarkable. We feel so fortunate to have become part of this special breed, and we are proud to announce that Kobe will be arriving soon to make his home with us. He will be our premier Rocky stallion to start our breeding program. We are so grateful to Bonnie, and so fortunate to have gained a friend like her.

***"ROCKIES ARE REAL INDEED"!***



Dave Ewert & Sundae



Dora



Sundae...

