

You Can't Have Just One
By Kathy Parrish 2004

I had owned and shown horses for over 15 years at the time I became interested in the Rocky Mountain Horse. I was warned early in my search that "you realize that you can't have just one...they're worst than potato chips." I had owned and shown horses for a long time and had never had more than one or two at a time. However, what had started out as a passion and love of horses had turned into an obsession to win in the show ring. Somewhere in the process, all the fun had gone out of it. It is not that I was not winning in the ring; I had championship ribbons to show for my efforts, and a beautiful show horse that I rode and drove. Her only problem was that she had the disposition of a rattlesnake. Finally, I came to a point in my life where something had to change. I decided that the answer was to slow down and go back to what I had enjoyed....trail riding.

Around that time, one of my friends brought over a copy of Horse Illustrated. She insisted that I read an article on a gaited breed of horse. Of course, it was the Rocky Mountain Horse. A few weeks later, I found myself in Kentucky at a little one-night horse show. Unbeknownst to me, a Rocky Mountain Horse was scheduled to give a demonstration at the show. As he gaited around the ring, the announcer told about the history of the breed. He was pretty and he seemed to be smooth, but to be honest, he did not impress me enough to consider paying the premium price commanded for that breed. Besides, I was not looking for another show horse. I wanted a laid back trail horse that I could trust enough to actually relax and enjoy myself. It was not until after he had left the ring that I began to re-evaluate my opinion. Instead of taking the horse back to his trailer, the rider rode the horse into the crowd, stopped, dropped the reins onto the horse's neck and proceeded to chat with the bystanders. But wait, didn't they say that was a stallion! That idiot is going to get someone killed! However, everything was OK. The horse just stood there with the crowd pressing up around him. I watched as the crowd thinned, and finally the rider picked up the reins and gaited over to another corner of the arena to repeat the performance. I knew that I had to check this breed out further, but I would have to go home the next day.

About two months later, I was getting ready to head back up to Kentucky. If things had gone as planned, I would have spent a week watching the World Championship horse show with an old friend from seats that had been reserved in my name for years. As luck would have it, she called the night before I was to drive up there. She would not be able to attend the first two days of the show, but would meet me there. By the time I got to Atlanta, I had decided to head toward Lexington to look at Rockies. I changed my hotel reservations and was on my way.

During that week, I stopped at many farms and made many new friends. Everyone was eager to show me their horses and tell me how wonderful they were. I had never ridden a stallion until that week, but by the end of the week I had ridden several. Much to my delight, they were much more laid back than the geldings of my previous breed. By the end of the week, I had found three mares that would meet my needs. Now I just needed to get the money. I did make it to the horse show...on the last day. During the course of the week, my friend had to

delay her arrival several times, until she finally would only be able to come the last day. While we were there, I caught up with my trainer and told him to put my show horse up for sale.

It took a few months to find a buyer. Once I had the money, I quickly started calling about the horses I had found. My first pick was a dark bay mare that was not as typey as the other two, but she was smooth as glass. Most importantly, something had clicked between her and me. I knew she was the one. She was owned by David and Phyllis McGuire. I was very disappointed when they informed me that they had decided to keep her. I had been the last person to which she had been shown. I called about the other two, but they had both been sold shortly after I had visited. It would mean another trip to find my horse, but it was already January, so it would have to wait until spring. I was very surprised to get a call from Phyllis a few weeks later. Had I bought a horse? Did I still want Cleo? Of course I did.

But Cleo was in foal. I did not really want the hassle of a foal. I begged David to keep Cleo there, let her have the foal, wean it and then send her to me and sell the foal. He would have not part of it...either I was buying her and she would come to Florida to have the foal, or I was not buying her and she would stay there. She soon arrived in Florida. Of course the foal's birth was only a month away, so I did not get to ride her. As the day drew near, I put her in the yard around the house so I could keep an eye on her. Instead, she ended up keeping an eye on me. I was very nervous about the birth of the foal, so it did not help when she decided that she should know where I was at all times. As I would move from one room of the house to the next, she would run around the house looking in the windows until she found me. I ended up getting a good book and some pillows and going into one of my back bedrooms. I opened the window and read for the next three days while she stood just outside. At night, she would move to my bedroom window in the front of the house. Of course, she had the foal right under my bedroom window during the night while I slept. By the time I awoke, it was strong, healthy and getting ready to stand for the first time. Cleo had a filly that I later named Mirror Image because she looked just like her mother except she had a white sock on the opposite hind leg.

I soon decided that Rocky Mountain foals were FUN. Mirror Image was wonderful and never got into any real trouble as a youngster. She was very people oriented and learned quickly. In fact, she was so much fun that I decided that Cleo should have another foal. I waited until the next year to send her back to Kentucky to be bred. While she was there, I went on a trip to Ohio and stopped by to check on her on my way back home. While at the farm I saw an absolutely beautiful chestnut mare, so of course I ended up buying her. The new mare soon had a chocolate filly that was quickly sold. The next year Cleo had a chocolate filly, Storm Warning's Contessa that was also sold. Contessa went on to be the 2001 High Point Filly in the nation. I was hooked.

I still own Cleo and Mirror Image. Cleo is still my favorite horse to ride...and the smoothest. Mirror Image had her first foal just last year. Appropriately enough, the first foal born at my farm had the first second generation foal born on the farm and it was the first colt to be born to the farm. I've slowly added mares, one at a time. I now own 6 mares, 1 gelding, and 7

yearlings. Some of the yearlings are for sale, but I can't imagine parting with any of my mares...they are each special in their own way.

Somewhere along the way, I helped to form the Florida Rocky Mountain Horse Association Club and just started serving my second term as its president. I recently bought a black gelding that I will be showing in Ladies Amateur Owned and Trained at both the Ocala and Tampa shows. Be sure to come by my stalls at the shows to say hello. I would be happy to answer any questions you have about the Rocky Mountain Horse.

Update: That black gelding did very well at those shows. Everyday he came away with at least one blue ribbon. The judge on the final day of the Florida State Fair shows was Rea Swan, one of the founders of the Rocky Mountain Horse Association. She placed us as the Florida Resident Champion, the Amateur Owned and Trained Champion and the Reserve Grand Champion. Not bad for a little black trail horse being shown for the first time.