

## New Owner's Guide To The Rocky Mountain Horse

By Jane Moor 2002

You have made that important decision to own a Rocky Mountain Horse. You are now starting on an incredible journey of sharing your life with this exceptional animal that the Rocky owner enjoys. This guide will help to prepare you for new experiences you will encounter on this gliding ride.

First you will experience AMAZEMENT. When my husband and I purchased our first Rockies, I was amazed that no matter how long between rides, they were the same smooth, calm mounts I had ridden several weeks or even months earlier. I had always owned stock type horses BR (before Rockies) and if they were not ridden regularly, lunging, extreme care, or both had to be used if I did not want to play rodeo. Even young, green Rockies remain pleasurable to ride after a long lay-off due to inclement weather or lack of riding time.

It is also amazing to see the most aggressive, foul tempered horse in the herd immediately transform into a docile, lovable mount when handled or tacked up. Your farrier and Vet will share your pleasure of working with an amiable horse and will look forward to visits to your barn.

Another amazing trait of the Rocky is the astounding intelligence and common sense they exhibit. Our first foal was about four months old when we came home from work and saw her running around the barnyard. She was not panic stricken, but I could tell something was definitely wrong by the way she ran continuously while the others stood and watched her. Getting closer, I could see she had something caught in her tail. In the pasture, she had acquired a large wild grapevine, and it was stubbornly caught in her tail. It would hit her back legs as she moved. I was truly amazed when she saw me come into the barnyard, ran to me, and waited gratefully as I untangled the vine from her tail.

Rockies love to roll. Over the years we have had Rockies become imprisoned under gates, against trees, or cast in stalls, where they resembled turtles flipped on their backs. We were very careful not to get kicked by flailing hooves when we worked at extricating the unfortunate horse, but to our amazement, there has not once been a struggling anxious horse. Each one has lain quietly as we pulled, pushed, and flipped them to get them out of their predicament.

A Walking Horse trainer started a typical Rocky filly under saddle for us. The trainer was amazed with the filly's intelligence and quickness to learn. The trainer told us, "She has more common sense than any horse I've ever worked with." Even though the Rocky has this amazing intelligence and calm personality, they DO get themselves in trouble!

Going out one morning to grain the horses, I discovered a three-month-old colt, Scamper, was missing. After the initial shock of discovering a foal seemingly having disappeared into thin air, I started wondering where he could be. His mother was with the rest of the herd and slightly upset, but did not seem overly concerned. However, I was beginning to panic! As I ran to the garage to get the car to drive to the back pasture, thinking he may have become trapped or caught in something there, I heard a baby whinny from a wooded area next to a paddock adjacent to the barn lot. This wooded area is mostly brambles, grapevines, and thick brush on a very steep slope. Navigating through it is almost impossible. The little escape artist had managed to get into that tangled jungle! I grabbed a halter and lead rope and slowly made my way toward him asking myself how in the world was I going to catch him and get him out of this mess? I worried that I was surely going to need help, but would give it a try to see how far we could go. Scamper was not completely halter trained yet, but when he saw me, he struggled through the maze to me and gladly received the halter. Together we carefully maneuvered through the brambles and over logs. He would stand patiently as I pulled vines away from his body and legs so we could move a few more feet. The last obstacle was down a steep creek bank, through the water, and up on the other side. I was utterly astonished as he followed closely and quietly through the entire ordeal. Scamper had scratches and cuts, but after reuniting with mom, all was well!

A trainer once said, "Horses are born to self destruct." The intense curiosity of a Rocky demands you "horse proof" your barn and pasture carefully. They notice and immediately investigate anything different, even tiny changes you would think would go unnoticed. Doors must be fastened securely, as some become skilled at opening doors easily. Because of their intelligence, they are easily bored and will create their own entertainment, which can badly alter equipment, gates, stalls, and buckets. They adapt quickly to a schedule, and will promptly let you know if you are not on that schedule, especially at feeding time. Each horse has its own idiosyncrasies, which can be hilarious or infuriating, depending on your individual "clown" and your patience.

When you own a Rocky, you will find you do not own just a horse, but have a friendly people loving COMPANION. Some foals are timid and at first want to hide behind mom, but many foals are curious and friendly at birth. This trait grows until it becomes difficult to do any chore without a horsy nose in your face, back, hair, and completely in the way. A special filly was Mischief, so named because of the unbelievable situations she got herself into starting at two days old. I was working on a fence in a pasture and a neighbor stopped by to visit. As we were solving the problems of the world, month old Mischief silently appeared, all by herself. She maneuvered under the neighbor's arm, snuggling up to him, so he had no choice but to scratch her neck. There she stood motionless until he left.

A favorite palomino gelding, Bud, was always a companion to me when I would walk back to the pasture to bring the herd to the barn. Mares and foals would rush to avoid a chance of missing their grain. Even as a weanling, Bud would stay behind to walk with me, or if he became caught up in the excitement, would remember and come back to join me, or stop and wait for me to catch up with him. He would then accompany me to the barn, always walking alongside me.

As you become accustomed to your Rocky, you will find you enjoy taking your new companion out into the world. Rockies thrive on new experiences and delight in seeing new sights. When I take young horses to parades, they act like the crowds and strange sights are there for their enjoyment. But when you take your Rocky out, be prepared for a lot of ATTENTION and QUESTIONS. You are going to meet many new horse acquaintances this way.

When I participate in local horse shows dominated by Quarter Horses and Paints, I am frequently asked, "What kind of horse is that?" My first experience with this question happened as we left the show ring. A lady literally ran across the show grounds after me waving her arms and calling for me to stop. She knew I wasn't riding a Walking Horse and wanted to know all about this beautiful horse. Lately, people relate that they have heard of Rockies, or have seen pictures of them. Just a few years ago, many did not have any idea what a Rocky Mountain Horse was.

At a recent show I rode Drifter, a black gelding. As I entered the arena a man's voice came booming from the other side, "Wow! What kind of horse is that?" An acquaintance told him it was a Rocky Mountain Horse, to which we all heard, "MAN, I LIKE THAT HORSE!"

At this same show, I decided to enter the Trail Class, which I never had attempted before. Drifter had just learned to side pass, so I thought we would give it a try. It did not go too badly at first, with Drifter taking everything in stride. I heard giggles from the spectators as Drifter wanted to personally inspect the obstacles, slicker, sack of cans, and the letter I had to take from mailbox. When the announcer read the places and he laughingly announced, "Fourth place goes to good ole Drifter", I knew Drifter had made more admirers with his endearing personality.

Drifter became the center of attention at the Fourth of July parade when he wore overalls, bandana, a hat, and baling twine reins. We were stopped during and after the parade by people who wanted to take his picture. Commonly asked was "How long did it take to train him to wear the costume?" I don't think some really

believed me when I told them I only put it on him for the fitting, and he was ready to go. The following year Drifter's celebrity continues as he was dressed as Uncle Sam.

A lady who purchased a very green gelding from us told how she would ride in the Cleveland Metroparks, drivers stopped their cars to take her horse's picture. She put it wonderfully when she said that when people get to know him, they will see where his real beauty come from, and that is from within. She and her barn friends kept repeating, "I can't believe this is only a 2 year old!" You will hear that comment a LOT!

As a Rocky owner you are now going to be an EDUCATOR. If you live in a non-gaited horse area such as ours, another question you will be asked often is "What kind of gait is that?" While trail riding, my horse gaited by some other horses. A young man bouncing along on a Quarter Horse asked, "WWWhhhaattt do you call that?" I couldn't resist answering, "Smooth." I then explained what a Rocky Mountain Horse is and what it does.

People who come to see and ride a Rocky always ask, "Are they really as gently and quiet as they say?" After they see them, handle them and ride, they answer their own questions with "They really ARE just like I've heard and read about them!" When new riders experience the responsiveness of Rockies to slight rein and leg cues, they will ask as they are riding along, "What do you do with your hands while you ride these horses?"

You will answer numerous questions about your Rocky, and some will take you by surprise. The most unusual question I've been asked occurred on a weekend trail ride. The first day I rode a 2-year-old filly. The Quarter Horses in the group were completely soaked in sweat returning to camp. As I pulled the saddle off, my filly was wet only under the saddle pad and girth. The next day I rode a 2-year-old gelding. The same thing happened at the end of the ride. One of the riders looked at my gelding and asked, "Don't you EVER allow your horses to sweat?"

If you want to confirm what I am telling you about the wonderful Rocky Mountain Horse, ask any owner. You will hear incredible tales of the astounding qualities of their lovable companions. You will also notice the immense PRIDE Rocky owners have in their horse, and very soon you will experience that same pride in your horse.

One final warning! Once you own a Rocky, other family members may want your horse. There have been actual cases (no names will be used here, as you KNOW who you are!) of a Rocky being bought for one family members and another person in that same family "takes over" the horse. Most Rocky families find they have to purchase other Rockies for each rider to keep the family peacefully.

Congratulations on becoming the owner of a Rocky Mountain Horse!!! You should now have an idea of what to expect as you set out on this exciting new path of ownership. Very soon you will be contributing your own additions to the "New Owner's Guide To The Rocky Mountain Horse.