

A Special Breed

By Madeleine G. Davison

335 Natick ct. Wexford, PA 15090

“Nick, it’s time for your riding lesson!” My mom shouted from downstairs. I sighed a big, deep sigh. My mom is a fanatic, I repeat, *fanatic* about horseback riding. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t *like* horses, it’s just that, well, a twelve-year-old boy sometimes has better things to do than, say, muck out stalls, or practice the half-pass at a trot.

The thing is, my mom and dad were really good riders. And I mean *really* good. Like, Olympics good. Mom was an Olympic showjumper, and Dad rode at World Equestrian Games in dressage. I was their only child and they must have expected me to be their protégé or something. Frankly, horseback riding is kind of a girl thing and I would like to be at least *slightly* cool, thank you.

I reluctantly slipped on my paddock boots and breeches. I don’t even get to wear cowboy boots, like the western riders. Mom and Dad think western riding is rough and undisciplined, sort of ‘giddy-up-and-go’ I guess. I personally think it’s cool. Cooler than dressage. But don’t tell my parents that. They’d kill me if they knew I said it.

When I got to the arena, Mom had my horse, Trickster, all tacked up and ready. I was late getting home from school that day, and my shower took longer than usual. She gave me a leg up and I was off. It was not until *two hours* later that I was back in my room with my comic books and other *boy* stuff. My mom came in to remind me that I have a show this weekend. (Gosh, Mom, I was trying to forget about that!!) Then, it’s lights out.

A week later I was in the hall at school getting a drink of water. All of a sudden this random kid I only vaguely recognized as the kid who had called me a 'stink-head' in 2nd grade came up and invited me to his birthday party. At first I was less than thrilled but when he mentioned pizza and a big bag of candy he'd gotten to share I couldn't help but say 'yes.' I mean, what else was I supposed to say?

As it turns out, there was something else he forgot to mention. His dad, who by the way is a *very* cool guy, owns a western stable. You know, I never thought that there were any western places besides the trail riding establishment near our house. So that was a shock. What was an even bigger shock, besides the fact I don't like Tootsie rolls any more, was that Alex (the kid whose birthday it was) was actually a pretty good rider. His dad never *made* him ride, but he had his own horse.

I never knew what I was missing (I mean that in terms of horses). Alex's horse Cade was this smallish, stocky, Quarter Horse-type-horse and he had a really pretty white face with icy blue eyes. His coat was bay tobiano, which is a paint coat color. He was a really nice horse and he followed Alex everywhere in the arena. If I sound like a horse-crazy nutball, I'm not. But after I got to ride Alex's mom's horse, Lacey (chestnut splash overo, according to Alex) on a trail ride with him and his three other friends in a *western* saddle, I decided that Paint horses were definitely my favorite breed. I asked Alex's Dad if they had any horses for sale (I was going to ask my parents about getting a Paint, but I knew they'd say no. Still...). He said no, but they'd call if they ever did.

When I got home, I knew better than to broadcast what I'd done to my mom and dad. I just went upstairs and got out my video games and baseball cards. But I couldn't forget the Paint horses.

About a week later, Alex asked me if I wanted to bring my horse over and ride with him. I could teach him a little English riding and he could teach me western. I have to admit, it sounded pretty appealing, but I was fairly certain that my parents wouldn't be too keen on that (Ha!). So instead I seized the opportunity to spend some time with Alex's Paint horses. I said that my parents didn't like to trailer our horses around and stuff. He said that was OK and I could ride Lacey again if I wanted. I said that sounded like a great idea, and so it was settled (Yes!!).

When I got to the stable that afternoon, Alex showed me how to cinch up a Western saddle. I let him do it mostly by himself. It was very confusing. I got on, and he showed me how to hold the reins and everything. Then he showed me how Cade could spin in circles which made me very dizzy.

Then we just rode on the trails. With the breeze and the sun and the slow, rhythmic jogging of the horses on the flat trail I *almost* fell asleep. I was so, so... *relaxed*, unlike the rigid, stiff collars and rules of the English show ring.

One day a while later my mom and I were at a show and I was in the grandstands watching the teenagers compete. I noticed out of the corner of my eye a gorgeous Paint mare. As it turned out, she won the class (equitation over fences). I pointed her out to my mom and said. "You know Mom; I've noticed that those loud-colored horses have been winning a lot of these classes. That Appaloosa was the one that beat me in hunter pleasure, remember?"

She nodded and then said, with a twinkle in her eye, "You like those Paint horses, don't you?" I nodded. "Are you suggesting that a Paint horse would improve your chances in the shows?" she asked, looking me full in the eye.

"Yeah, I guess." I said, trying to sound like it didn't matter. Maybe my mom was cooler than I had thought.

"Well, we'll look into it," she said, which basically meant 'yes.'

Two months later (it took a little work convincing Dad that a Paint horse would be just the thing for English pleasure and everything), I had a chestnut tobiano Paint gelding called White Sox. I named him after the baseball team. And he had white socks. Blue eyes, too. I never got to ride him at Alex's place but to me, that didn't matter. He was the most perfect horse I'd ever had. Even my mom and dad liked him. To this day, I don't think I'll ever have another breed of horse. Paint horses are a special breed in *my* book.