

Trials of a Horse Crazy Thirty-Something
Part Three: Stupid Things I've Done
By Jennifer Walker

The Intelligence Cycle

I think there's an old adage that says something about how when you're little, you know nothing, when you're a teenager you know everything, when you're in your 20's you start to realize how little you know, and when you get old you get wise. Either that's a famous saying that I've managed to butcher, or I'm really brilliant and came up with it on my own! In any case, I'm in the "how little you know" phase. In fact, I think I might be getting dumber the further I get into my thirties!

When I was a teenager, I was a great rider. I could ride any horse and stick any buck through sheer force of will and ego alone. I was invincible, never getting sick or feeling any pain. I also knew everything about horses, which was pretty convenient. For some reason, the adults in my life found this amusing, which I didn't understand until later.

I sold my last horse due to lack of funds when I was 23, so I hadn't quite had time to shift to the "how little you know" phase while I still had horses. Therefore, during the 10-year interim of not owning horses, I managed to stay in the "I know everything" mindset. After all, the last I checked, I DID know everything!

I had to make a rapid shift in thinking when I started riding again. All of a sudden, I realized that I didn't know quite as much as I thought I did, didn't ride quite as well as I remembered, and I was about as far from invincible as you can get. However, I've found that I've gotten complacent over the past couple years when it comes to safety rules, thinking that my horse was too smart and loyal to do anything silly. As it turns out, I'm wrong. Over and over again. Eventually I will learn my lesson that they're just horses and stop taking these little risks. I hope that I won't be in the hospital when that happens!

Blanket Woes

This year was the first year that I've ever kept a horse blanketed. I body clipped my mare, Molly, so that I could keep working her through the winter and not have to deal with that fuzzy coat. I started with one blanket in the fall, slowly adding to my collection so that she would be comfortable in any imaginable sort of weather. The mare has more clothes than I do. She has summer sheets and winter blankets. She has waterproof sheets and fly sheets. She has the cutest blue plaid for summer, and a shoulder guard to prevent unsightly rubs. This girl could do her own fashion parade.

I also have two sheets on my sewing room floor, waiting for me to fix them thanks to one...well, two...ok, three of my complacent moments. Since Molly is so mature and well behaved despite her tender age of 5, I'd never bothered with haltering her when dressing or undressing her. Also, being a little lazy, I generally didn't undo the front buckles—electing instead to slip the blanket over her head.

This procedure worked pretty well for a while, until one morning a friend went to take her sheet off for me. Molly decided that she didn't want to cooperate and through up her head as it was halfway off, then took off running. The red sheet was streaming behind her like a cape. I assumed that this was a desire on Molly's part to play Superhorse that day rather than some sort of fear of the blanket, so continued following the same procedure while blanketing. Imagine my surprise when she played Superhorse AGAIN! This time, the sheet was destroyed and its one useful function is providing parts to other mistreated items of horsey clothing. When the Superhorse cape's week-old replacement joined it on the sewing room floor, we decided that Molly would wear a halter for blanketing and unblanketing.

Molly's boyfriend Clever lives next door to her, and he is a perfect gentleman about having his jammies put on and taken off. So much so, that he never, ever needs a halter. That is, until I got a hold of him! I must be carrying blanket gremlins around in my pockets, because I have the worst luck. One sunny Saturday when Clever's mom was out of town, I removed his three blankets for her. It was a bit warm by the time I got there, so he was pretty happy to be getting undressed. When I pulled the last layer off, he'd decided that he'd stood there for long enough and decided it was time to go find a good muddy spot to get nice and dirty. Unfortunately, the tail cord of the blanket caught on the knot in his tail wrap, and no amount of stern "Whoa!" would make him stop. He finally trotted away, pulling the blanket out of my grasp.

You would think that the cord would have just bounced off his tail and landed in the mud and all would have been well. Wrong! That sucker tied itself in a knot and proceeded to chase him as he ran around and around in his pen trying to get away from the white monster that was chasing him. It chased him as he jumped over his gate and ran laps around the ½ mile track that surrounds the property. It chased him as he found the hole in the fence and ran down the road, to a busier one. It chased him down a side street, over two fences and through two fields, over another fence and into someone's backyard before we finally caught up with him. The problem with horses that are fit for 50-mile endurance rides is, they can run a LONG way! Thank God he was ok, but from that moment on, every horse in the barn gets a halter when blankets are put on or taken off, the fence has been fixed, and the gate stays closed at all times.

The Washrack Mishap

One day last summer, Rachel and I were schooling together and finished riding at the same time. It was hot and both horses were sweaty, but there's only one washrack. Rachel said, "Do you think they'd be ok if we had them in there together?"

"Sure," I replied. After all, they're in love. What could happen? Things were going well until it was time to wash Molly's face. She's generally pretty well behaved about it, although she doesn't enjoy it. In order to be as non-confrontational about it as I could, I turned down the water pressure and held the hose up to the side of her head to let it trickle down. Apparently, this is far scarier than a full blast in the face, because she

flipped out and started pulling back. Being that the washrack has been there since the days of Moses, the wooden board she was tied to was a little bit rotten and it came loose...sending her and Clever flying out of there with the board in pursuit. How I managed to not get hit by board or horse I have no idea, but Rachel was thrown to the ground and stepped on.

The horses ran around the previously mentioned ½ mile track, managing to lose the board somewhere along the way without breaking anything. They were intercepted at the other end of the track and allowed themselves to be caught, only slightly excited from the experience. I may be dumb, but I'm definitely lucky!

Learning From My Mistakes

Rachel's decided that I'm only allowed one dumb act per quarter. I'm not allowed to take shortcuts anymore, like leaving halters off, gates open, etc. I had to take a solemn vow to stop and think before doing something stupid. I guess riding bareback in a halter up to the corner store is out of the question!