



The Right Horse

By Peggy Johnson



We are all looking for the "right" horse, but we don't know we have it until it's tried and proven. Sometimes we try several horses until we find it and sometimes we never find the right horse. This is a story of my little seven-year-old blue corn Spanish Mustang and my ten-year-old granddaughter, Ashley.



After my first CTR in 1995 I was hooked. I loved watching all the horses and began to notice the Spanish Mustang, a breed of horse that I had never heard of before. I was impressed with their temperament, toughness, and found myself drawn to them. So when I was looking for another horse I ended up bringing home Fandango Mist in 1998. He was a three-year-old that I bought from Karma Farms. Tomlyn Speir who was then twelve started him. He was a quiet, bold horse who was trusting and willing. I rode alone and with my friends and he would follow their horses anywhere. We mostly walked that first year and learned how to be ready for all the obstacles. When he was four, we started trotting and conditioning for CTR. Mist and I have competed in ten rides, and he really seems to enjoy the competitions. He loves to walk, but is happy to trot. He doesn't mind being passed by other horses and is willing to pass himself, too. As long as he is moving, he is happy. I enjoy taking pictures of others at the rides and would often drop the reins and turn and take pictures as others rode past us, or turn around and get a good shot of someone riding behind us. Mist didn't care.

My granddaughter has always loved horses. So when Ashley was six, she began riding lessons. This was about the same time I got Mist. I



wanted her to learn to ride balanced and enrolled her with Molly Phelps who taught her to ride with an English saddle. Molly emphasized safety first and taught Ashley what to do if the horse becomes out of control. She had to memorize, "Don't panic, sit back, pull and release, and kiss butt" before she even got to ride. This year she started riding Mist at riding lessons, and we have been trail riding together and with our friends.

Ashley and Mist's first CTR together was at A Kiamichi Spring in the Kiamichi Mountains near Nashoba, Oklahoma. My friend, Relda Sterkx, started me in NATRC, and so it was that Relda and Ashley rode together on this ride. Relda is a wonderful teacher and shared with Ashley the secrets of CTR as they went along on the trail. I was at the observations taking pictures and was able to check on her. It was a tough, rocky ride in the mountains. It was cold and rained. Ashley never complained. Both Mist and Ashley had been training for four years for this ride and it is hard for me to tell you how proud I was of both of them. It was almost like giving birth and the wonderful feeling that all is well and fine.

Ashley loved the ride even though the weather had been bad.



I was able to ride with Ashley and Mist at the Sam Houston Region IV Director's Benefit CTR in the Sam Houston National Forest in Cold Springs, Texas. Now that she understood what was expected of her in this competitive setting, she rode with confidence and Mist responded. Most of the time she would ride behind me (Mist is too lazy to set a good pace). Sunday she wanted to ride in front some and one time while trotting she turned to me and said, "are you alright?". Ok, maybe I asked her too many times, but she really was checking on me! I laughed. She went out first at the observations. One was a tall log that Novice had to step over, count to five, and then back over, and then walk over. They did it! Later, near the end of the ride, Novice was instructed to walk through a deep pond (up to most horses' bellies) and keep

the ribbons on the right. They went up and down a hill. Well, there were two trails on the top of the hill. Later, Ashley was told most of the rider's took the middle trail. But she stopped and looked and followed the one that had the ribbons on the right, which was the correct one that they all were suppose to take!

The weather was beautiful and warm. Ashley played with her friend, Jenna, back in camp. Sunday they included Mist in their play and groomed him and looked for ticks. They had eaten strawberries and decided that Mist would like them too. They put it in his mouth, and of course, he spit it out and made a face. They continued to open his mouth and shove it in and even hid it in hay trying to disguise it. It was hard to tell who enjoyed the game the most, the giggling girls or the horse who never moved. As we drove home and went over the events of the weekend, I complimented Ashley for a job well done. She had earned a horse score of 99 with two pluses, a score I still am striving to earn.

I am so relieved and happy to have found the right horse for Ashley to ride with me at these competitions. Mist came in 3rd and Ashley 2nd at A Kiamichi Spring and Mist came in 2nd and Ashley 3rd at the Sam Houston Region IV Benefit CTR. They are on their way to becoming a winning team!

