

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

Adventures with an Appaloosa

By: Jim Taylor

The horse suddenly jerked his head to the right causing my heart to leap in my chest. I was riding down the narrow ridge of a rough mountain and was not too sure about where we were going. The horse's sudden move unsettled me. I glanced down to the right and not 30 feet away stood two Whitetail bucks. From the way they were quivering I could tell they were about to break and run for the brush. The horse stopped as I pulled the .45 single action from my shoulder holster. I tried to turn the horse's head away from the pistol, as the muzzle was near his right ear. All to no avail. This horse loved to hunt almost as much as I did and he was not about to let the two bucks out of his sight. I gripped him as tight as I could with my knees, prepared for a rodeo on the mountainside, and pulled the trigger. At the shot the two deer wheeled and ran into the brush. The gelding never flinched.

Surprised that the shot did not booger him and surprised that the buck did not drop, I sat there for moment. As I did I saw one deer run from the trees at the bottom of the canyon. I "played" everything back through my mind. The gun had been steady, the sights directly on the deer's front shoulder, and there was no discernible flinch when I let the shot go. I thought to myself, "I had to have hit him!" Pulling the horse around I rode down through the brush and trees. About 50 feet down the trail lay the buck. The shot had taken him directly through the shoulders and had removed the top of his heart. I tied up the horse, cleaned the deer, then packed it on the horse and headed up the mountain, leading him.

Coming up over the top of the mountain the horse suddenly sat back against the lead rope, then began to jerk, kick and run backwards. I tried to get around behind him and whack him with a rope to take his mind off of whatever was bothering him. It did no good. I even fired a couple shots into the ground behind him, but he continued to run backwards until he fetched up against a large Mesquite tree. By this time my pants leg was shredded, the deer was hanging upside down underneath the wall-eyed horse, and everything had gone to heck. After finding he could back up no further the horse settled down and soon I was able to get everything off him and lead him out to a clear spot. I tied him to a tree got everything repacked. After that episode we had no more problems and made it home without further incident.

All I could figure is maybe his ears stopped ringing and he suddenly woke up to the fact there was a dead creature on his back. Who knows?

I had been hunting the little Coues Whitetail Deer that are found down in the Southeast corner of Arizona. Tough, wiry and very sneaky, the little deer are

a real challenge to hunt. Stalking them on foot can be hard because of the extremely rough terrain they are found in. I had one horse that I could ride into the roughest country, an Appaloosa named "Hud". He had run wild until 4 or 5 years old, then was caught and gelded and greenbroke. I borrowed him from a rancher in the area and finished him up, breaking him to gunfire in the process. Hud was the most sure-footed critter I have ever ridden. In bad country he would go slow, put his head down and look where he was placing his front feet. I rode him in places I was scared to get off and walk in. The morning I shot the buck while sitting in the saddle I had ridden him down a shale slope that was absolutely scary! Hud never slipped a foot. But he had one bad habit. While leading him - or sometimes while just standing on the ground holding the reins - he would start running backwards. Wall-eyed and snorting he would drag you around for awhile, then for no apparent reason that I ever discovered, he would quit. He never boogered while anyone was on his back. It was always while you were holding either the reins or a lead rope.

He was uncomfortable to ride. His front legs were quite a bit shorter than his back ones and it always felt - when you were riding him for very long - that you had been driving a '49 Chevy pickup with real hard tires and no shock absorbers on a very rough road. His long back legs gave him a lot of jump though, and he could go up a hillside faster than you wanted to. He could pull a lot of weight easily. When my wife shot a large Mule deer on a rough mountain slope, I got a rope around it's neck and old Hud drug it right to the spot where I could hang it easily. It didn't even wind him.

His feet were about the size of dinner plates. I used "0" shoes on him all around and had to widen the backs of them before I nailed them in place. It was neat to see him look at where he was going to put his front feet when you were riding in bad country. He would put his head down and check out the ground. I once rode him down a rock ledge in the winter. The rocks were ice-covered and steep.

It was about 40 feet to the bottom. I was ready to bail out of the saddle if he slipped, but Hud just put his head down, looked at his footing all the way down and we never had a problem.

The old guy really liked hunting. After we got used to each other he understood what the game was all about and I found out that he really knew what was going on. If I rode up to a point and stopped to look, he would begin looking and listening. If he put his ears up and looked in a certain direction I soon learned there really was something over there, even if I could not see it. I was sitting on the edge of a canyon one morning looking east and Hud kept trying to look west, behind us. I finally turned around and there about 200 yards off was herd of Javelina. He was real good at spotting deer and seemed excited about deer hunting. He could spot them a half mile or more away. The morning I shot the deer I spoke of at the beginning he had pointed out 3 of them to me.

They were so far away I could not make out if they were bucks or does with the binoculars. We went down a shale slope into the bottom of a canyon and up the other side to where we had last seen the deer. We jumped out a large buck who went over a fence and disappeared around a mountain at high speed. Turning around we rode down the ridge. As I was looking around Hud swung his head to right and stopped. You know the rest.

I used him for several years and then finally gave him back to his owner. I would have bought him but by then the rancher figured he was worth a lot more than I wanted to pay. A couple years went by and then one deer season we had more hunters than we had horses for. I called the rancher and asked if I could borrow Hud for deer season. He said, "Sure. No problem. But you will have to catch him." Seems he turned Hud out and had let him run for the past few years.

We found him with some other half-wild horses in a pasture that had a large cienega. Hud would run through the swamp whenever we got close. It took us a while but eventually we trapped him. I got him back to the corral and cleaned him up, put shoes on him and gave him a good currying. It appeared that he had forgotten how to stand when he was being shod, or perhaps he just did not want to do it anymore. I got the gear on him and screwed it all down tight, then tried climbing on. I had taken a short rein in my left hand and it was a good thing as he tried dumping me by whirling around. I got down into the saddle and held on while he half-heartedly tried to bump me off. We rode around the corrals for a while and then went out into the hills a bit. He seemed to enjoy it until I pulled out my .45 six-shooter and let fly at a rock or two. We were in the middle of a large clear area and used it all up before he settled down. It turned out that Hud had become a member of the anti-gun crowd.

We worked on his attitude until I got too sore and tired. Then we went back to the house. For the next few days that was the routine until Hud settled down somewhat. By then deer season was just a day away.

When the hunters arrived I parceled out the nags to them and gave Hud to one of my best friends. He had never ridden anything but soft, gentle horses and I figured him and Hud should get acquainted. I showed him how to short-reign the horse when getting on first thing in the morning. Hud never did dump him, though he gave it a try several times. We hunted three days and got some nice deer. The guy riding Hud got into a nice herd of Mule Deer and got off the horse to take a shot at a buck about 40 or 50 yards away. Just as he was about to shoot, old Hud started his backwards running trick and he never did get to fire a shot. He was mad as heck about that and spent the rest of the day talking about shooting the horse. Coming into the corrals that night I pulled my pistol and fired a shot in the ground to let my wife know we were back in. As I did I glanced back and saw Hud buck and this guy's feet go up past his ears. He managed to stay on, however, and we all got a good laugh from it. Well, all of us except the guy on Hud.

A few days later I returned Hud to his rightful owner. I never saw him again. He was a most perplexing horse, for you could teach him some things, have him demonstrate that he knew it, and yet in a short time he seemed to forget. I think it is a trait of the breed. I have been told the reason that some Indian tribes rode Appaloosa's was so they would be real good and mad by the time they got to the fight. I know for certain, Hud could do that to you. I still miss him.

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