

HALLELUJAH

By Pete Dillingham

This horse was different! In fact, the young cowhand would never have bought it from that “sermon toting” minister ...except this sorrel mare was just so darn good lookin’. The horse wasn’t crazy or goofyit was the fancy way that traveling preacher taught his horse...it was just different! To get the critter to come out of the pasture, you had to repeat John 3:16, to ground tie the mare the rider had to recite the Lord’s Prayer, to drink water required saying the 23rd Psalm, the stop signal was “Hallelujah” and to “getty-up”, the cue was “Praise the Lord”. The cowpoke was sure to be converted by sunset!

Well, money and horse were exchanged and the young horseman squeezed, bumped and kicked his horse “to go”but the little mare played statue. Than he remembered “Praise the Lord” and the horse leaped to a brisk canter. A smile of relief spread across the cowhand’s face as he felt the power of each stride. Then he tempted fate and whispered into the sorrel’s ear “Praise the Lord” and she jumped into a gallop, again he hollered the magic words and his newly purchased steed raced into an “eye watering” run. Life for a ranch hand couldn’t have been sweeter.....until the happy cowpoke saw the edge of the Grand Canyon looming in the near distance.

The young wrangler pulled back on the reins, which only added fuel to the fire. What happened next is only speculation, but some observers recall hearing language that would make a sailor blush, the four gospels recited in their entirety, and “Now I lay me down”! Finally a resounding “Hallelujah” was heard echoing off the canyon walls. Hooves screeched to the edge of a thousand foot drop-off. The young cowboy wiped his brow.... and with a huge sigh of relief uttered ...“Praise the Lord!”

You can never underestimate the importance of a good stop. But what is a good stop? A good stop is a good backup! I know, you are wondering if I’ve lost my marbles. Think of stopping a horse like driving a motor boat. When you approach the dock, the driver can’t hit the brakes (there’s no such thing with boats) so the navigator “reverses the engine” and the craft drifts forward but is being slowed down by the backing up power of the propeller. When a horseback rider slows down or stops a horse, they use the same weight and rein signals that they would use to “reverse engines” or back up. If your steed has a good reverse, than it has a good stop.

A good “back up” (stop) is great for obvious and not so obvious reasons. Some of the less apparent reasons are

1. **Balance.** I know, you are saying “Wow buckeroo, you’re starting to get a little technical here!” It’s really simple, look at horses playing in the pasture. When a racing steed comes to a screeching halt, it balances naturally on its back legs (or hip). Many horses under saddle stop with their front feet (it’s called “crow-hopping’) because their riders don’t know how to encourage their critter to use its hip to stop. Good horse persons use skillful communication signals to back up (forcing the horse to balance on rear end) and use that same language to stop. The steed will stop under saddle as beautifully and naturally as it does in the pasture.
2. **Back ups are great for consequences.** Life is full of repercussions....if we run a stop sign, we get a ticket..... if we turn against a “one-way” street, we get a lot of honking cars (or potential hood ornaments!). If a horse runs a stop sign or

makes a wrong turn, the “stop-back up” becomes a super consequence. Horses don’t “cotton” to reversing engines because they have to work harder and there are no eyes in their tail hairs. A rider’s usage of consequences is limited only by their imagination.

- 3. Body building. “What the heck do you mean ’body building’?”. Backing up and stopping correctly are like exercises to us.....their back leg muscles become stronger. This helps horses turn better, take off faster, and for Tennessee Walkers, it takes the bumps out of their bounce.**

Our enjoyment in horseback riding hinges on developing good communication with our horse. A quality backup-stop can become a “springboard” to rides that are more fun, more athletic, and safer. Hallelujah!