

Rocky
By Pete Dillingham

He was truly an “ugly duckling”. The little colt was doomed to be a “homely one” from the moment he was a twinkle in his mama’s eye. “Rocky” was a pure, unadulterated, blue-blooded, Mustang. Mustangs are a 300-year socialization of sleek, big-footed, long-eared horses that survived a world full of predators (including man) by their wits and fast legs. What Rocky lacked in looks was more than compensated for in his intelligence.

A “two for one” deal was not what I had bargained for when I picked up the pregnant mustang mare, but the little guy was here to stay. I wasn’t surprised to see him quickly wrap an entire herd of seventy horses around one of his hooves. I wasn’t “too” surprised when my staff of wranglers became smitten by this unsightly yearling..... but I should have “gotten the drift” when gate locks and slip stalls were mysteriously unlatched.

“Slip stalls,” you say, “what in good gracious is a slip stall?” A slip stall is a three-foot wide hallway that is tall enough and long enough to hold a horse. At the end of this corridor is a manger and feed box loaded with hay and grain. These stalls are ideal for bringing a large herd of horses to the dining room table at the same time, and have been used in barns for centuries. Occasionally a horse will flick its tail at a pesky fly and accidentally unhook the butt chain that keeps the steed in the stall...with Rocky it wasn’t an accident.

At first it was cute to see the colt routinely liberate himself from his stall. The little rascal would walk around (like he owned the place) while the rest of the herd was confined to quarters. Suddenly a couple other horses started getting loose then a few more. Things were getting out of control! After some “peek-a-boo” tactics, the ranch crew discovered that Rocky was lifting (with his teeth) hooks off the chains that secured each critter. The most amazing thing about this feat is every horse freed was white.....the color of his mother.

In the years since meeting the “Rock,” I’ve met hundreds of gifted horses. Their talents were always there, but before the colt, I didn’t take the time to see them. That’s the way it is with people too...if we look beyond the obvious, we discover their genius. The ugly duckling taught me a good lesson.