

Hey JW,

I was going through old blog posts and found this one from about 6 years ago. I suspect that the young woman we rode with, Raven, would be a kindred spirit with you – and make me

- (a) ashamed of expecting so little of Sunny and
- (b) embarrassed at the level of my sissy – ness.

Let me know what you think.

A couple of months ago, a young woman named Raven moved four horses into the barn where I keep Sunny. The horses are gorgeous paints and they range in age from 2 to 5 years old. I've run into Raven a few times and really enjoyed chatting with her. She was a trainer of cow horses in Colorado, worked cattle on ranches, and actually made her living training roping horses and competing in roping contests. She's getting connected up down here and is going to start roping here this week. Anyhow, she's knowledgeable and fun to be around – tells a great story and listens, as well. We chatted about places to ride in the area and finally set up a date to trailer out to Ft. Ord for this AM.

She arrived pretty close to on time, but opened her truck door and sort of slumped – she'd brought her dog along. The dog, River, is an 8 month old hunting dog and goes with her every place. She meant to leave him home, but he jumped in her truck, as usual, and she drove off, as usual, and she didn't think about it until she arrived at the barn. I told her it wasn't the end of the world: off leash dogs are allowed at Ft Ord. She had ridden with River in the past and it worked out well, so we decided to just take the dog and go on with our plan.

With that issue resolved, Raven went to get her mount for the day. When I saw her choice, I was a little concerned. It wasn't one of the 5 year old mares; nope, it was her 2 year old gelding. I'm thinking "Dog. 2 year old. New trail. Bossy Arab mare. Yikes." The next cultural hurdle for me was that Raven asked if I would mind if she trailered her gelding, Andy, tacked up – since we weren't taking her trailer, she was concerned that she'd forget something. I couldn't see how it could hurt Sunny, so I said okay and off we went.

We had a great conversation and the trip to Ord went quickly. When we pulled the ponies from the trailer and I started to tack up, Raven said, "Uh oh." She'd forgotten her bridle and reins. So she tied his lead rope to his halter and was ready to go. So now I'm thinking, "Dog. 2 year old in halter. New trail. Bossy Arab mare. Yikes. Super Yikes." But off we go, Sunny in the lead, Andy and Raven next, and River the dog trailing.

We get maybe 200 yards up the trail and Raven says, "River's gone!" We went back down the trail, yelling for River and found him circling my truck, looking for a nice place to wait for us. Raven got him moving with us and we took off again. This time we made it about a half mile before River headed for the parking lot – so Raven put him on a long lead line, mounted Andy and took off. I must have looked askance because she said, "If he can pull calves, he can surely pull this puppy!" And he did. And the puppy came along.

After about a mile, we decided it was safe to try to let River off leash again. This time it worked. He was like Buzz: he zig-zagged in front of us and checked out the birds and just ran like a puppy. Raven and I were finally in trail ride mode, just bustling along at a fast walk, chatting about Trails We Have Ridden. But it was hot and River's coal black. After about another mile, we realized that he wasn't with us, so we looked back. He was sitting calmly along side the trail about 50 yards back. We called and cajoled. No response. He just sat. We rode back and he was clearly really hot and really done with this trail riding thing.

I was figuring out the fastest way to get back to the trailer when Raven got off Andy, grabbed River, who weighs about 70 pounds, sort of lunged and jumped and put him in her saddle, then held him in place while she climbed aboard, too. See the pictures below.



River Getting On



River Makes it Aboard Andy



River, Raven and Andy Hit the Trail

We got to the top of the ride, and Raven decided that River could take another shot at being a trail dog – he didn't want to get off. Raven finally got off and had to tear him away from the saddle. Neither he nor Andy were frantic, but River was determined that he wanted to ride, not walk. On the picture below, you can't see it, but he has one rear foot in the stirrup and is holding on \*tight\*.



River Trying to Stay Aboard

Anyhow, Raven did ultimately get him off and we made it safely back to the trailer, including a couple of short stints of trotting. Raven has decided River can't come trail riding until he's two. And I've decided that Andy is a saint, but I need to start expecting more



Raven gets on Andy with River. For the First Time.

Again, I say, this is a 2 year old horse. Raven settled herself in and we took off. Sunny was leading, and it was so calm I'd forget that there was a dog in the saddle behind us. The only change was that Sunny wouldn't let Andy ride beside her anymore – she lost all respect for him when he let that dog get on his back. Sheesh.



River, Relaxing