

## A Cowboy's First Ride

by Mandy Boggs

When most people think about riding horses, they usually picture something they have seen in a movie. Maybe a group of cowboys out west moving a herd of cattle before crossing a raging river, or a regal king leading his army into battle atop his brave steed. Perhaps, you have ridden a horse before. Maybe it was a relative who had a well-mannered horse you walked around on, or maybe you got to take a picture next to a beautiful carriage horse while visiting New York City one summer. What most people don't think about, is what goes into getting these horses trained to be the movie stars, carriage horses, or spoiled pets to the horse loving relative you have.

Rich Bradshaw and Patrick Cooper are the real life cowboys that get these horses to be the well trained, rideable, horses we all think about. Rich Bradshaw has been training horses for fifty years. Many of those years have been out of his training stable at the Geauga County Fairgrounds in Burton, Ohio. Patrick Cooper, has been riding his entire life and has been Rich's right hand man for quite a few years now. Rich has always been well known in the local horse community for being the one you send your problem horses and "un-broke" horses to. When a young horse is old enough to be ridden, they go through a process often referred to as "breaking" or "backing". This simply means the horse is going to learn how to wear a saddle and carry a rider. Most people are not experienced enough (or brave enough) to "break" young horses who have never had a rider. Horses have their own unique personalities and every horse is always different in how they react and adapt to becoming a riding horse. As Rich has gotten older, Patrick has been the brave cowboy who climbs on these juvenile horses – sometimes going for a wild ride!

The majority of Rich's customers have "western horses". These are your typical Quarter Horses and other breeds that are ridden with a western saddle and do different jobs like trail riding, cattle work, roping cattle, barrel racing, and showing. However, sometimes Rich gets customers with "English horses". These are usually Thoroughbreds (racehorses), "Warmbloods" (a nickname for breeds that originated in Europe), and other breeds used for English disciplines. Many people think of "English horses" as the horses that jump courses of obstacles.

"Sheldon" is one of those English horses. He is considered a "Warmblood" with his bloodlines consisting of generations of jumping horses from Europe. On paper, his pedigree has some of the best jumping horses in European history. Jumping horses are also very tall compared to "western horses". Sheldon, even at only three years old, is huge. He towers over all the horses he walks past in Rich's stable. Sheldon, is my horse. I owned his mother who was my jumping horse for my teenage through adult life, for thirteen years. When she retired from jumping I decided to let her become a mom so that I could have one of her offspring to raise and be my next horse. Sheldon was born in 2012 at our farm after weeks of waiting for his arrival. When he was born, he was so lazy he laid in our laps and took a nap before he tried to stand up and nurse. He was tall with long legs he awkwardly stood on and wobbled around whenever he

tried to walk. My Mother and Sister named him “Sheldon” after the character on the TV show, “The Big Bang Theory”.

Sheldon just turned three years old and is ready to learn how to have a rider. I have used Rich and Patrick to “break” our other young horses, including Sheldon’s older sister. Although, I live many hours away in another state, I knew I wanted Rich and Patrick to be the first ones to teach Sheldon about growing up. I loaded Sheldon into my horse trailer and made the trip back home to Chardon for this important milestone in Sheldon’s career as a riding horse. Sheldon had his first and second ride this week and so far it has been a success.

Rich uses various methods and techniques when he starts training young horses. Every horse reacts differently, goes at a different pace, and requires different methods to be effective. Rich has fifty years of experience as a horseman, and uses that lifetime of experience to read each horse as an individual. Some horses learn and accept having a rider easier than others. For Sheldon, his very first sessions was taken at his own pace. Rich held a long rope that was attached to Sheldon to make sure he couldn’t get too far away if things got a little wild. Patrick slowly puts the pad and saddle on his back, over and over, until Sheldon does not seem to mind the feeling of having a saddle on. Next, they tighten the saddle so that it is secure on his back, and Patrick puts a foot in the stirrup and slowly climbs on. He makes sure that the horse is calm and comfortable with each step. For Sheldon, who is naturally pretty lazy, he was not bothered by this. Patrick climbs on and they slowly start moving Sheldon forward at a walk, while Rich is close by with the rope in hand to keep Sheldon in a small area.

Some horses get wild and buck, rear, run, and do anything they can to get the rider off. Other horses, as just unsure about what is going on but try their best to understand and deal with it. Rich pays close attention to Sheldon’s eyes during the whole process. Those who are experienced with horses will tell you that you can read a horse by the “look in their eye”. If the horse starts to have a fearful look, Rich will stop, and go back a step to where the horse was comfortable. This ensures that the people on the ground and the horses back stay safe, and the horse has a good experience. Horses have a natural instinct of “fight or flight”. Again, each horse is different based on their personality and when scared or frustrated some horse’s natural instinct is to either throw a fit (fight) and try and get the rider off, or run (flight) and get away from the situation. Patrick never knows what type of horse he has under him or what they will do, but their experience and patience is what makes them good at what they do. They can read a horse so well that they almost always know how to approach each situation.

Sheldon had a few moments where he thought maybe he would like to get Patrick off his back, but his laziness was an advantage as his energy level was so low, it was nothing Patrick couldn’t

handle. Within fifteen minutes, Patrick was riding Sheldon around at a walk and trot (jog) looking like a normal riding horse. In Sheldon's second session, Patrick followed the same steps with Rich close by holding the end of the rope, he climbed on, and they continued working on their lesson of teaching Sheldon about carrying a rider. These sessions will continue until he is safe enough for myself to take over his training. Rich always has at least a few young horses in training, so this is a normal day to him. To Sheldon, this is one of the most important days of this young horse's life. He is now on his way to becoming an adult. For Rich and Patrick, he is just a horse. It doesn't matter if they are bred to chase cows, pull carriages, act in movies, or jump fences. They start all the horses the same and go at whatever pace the horse needs. For this reason, this is why I loaded up my horse and drove many hours to come back home for a while so Sheldon could get a great start!