

## **“Kixs”**

### **The Bucking Horse**

I first met Kixs when his owner brought him to my horse camp in 2012. Kixs' owner told me that he was fine to ride except at the canter. Many people, including trainers, had tried cantering Kixs and every time he would immediately go into bucking. Not realizing the extremity of Kixs' buck, I told his owner to let me ride him. Sure enough, as soon as I asked for the canter, he immediately started bucking, and not just a buck here and there, but full rodeo bronc bucks. Kixs managed to unseat me and as I hit the ground and looked up his front feet were coming down on top of me. I rolled and he missed me, but I discovered that there were some serious emotional issues in Kixs mind.

After camp ended, his owners agreed to leave Kixs with me for a couple of months to see if I could break his dangerous bucking habit. So, the training begun.

**Week One:** I began tackling the issue on the lunge line. I wanted to see if Kixs had a girth issue and what kind of situations sent him into bucking. The first time that I lunged Kixs, he went into bucking the moment I asked him to trot. In response to his bucking, I pulled his head to me to throw him off balance and to change his direction until he stopped bucking. What I found was that Kixs was strong and was going to buck until he wore out or lost whatever he didn't like, so I had to find a different consequence for his bucking. I tried lunging him in a rope halter, but I still couldn't get control of him once he started bucking. What finally worked was a nylon halter with a chain over his nose. Kixs quickly learned that bucking was not an acceptable response.

I then added triggers to Kixs training. The more that I could set him off, the more opportunities I had to correct the bucking. In Kixs' mind, bucking was the answer to everything that he didn't like or wanted to do. I draped towels, grain sacks, short lengths of rope all over the saddle and if he went into bucking, I would shut him down by changing his direction. Soon, he started to think about each situation versus instantly resisting it.

**Week Two:** Week two consisted of more time on the lunge line, but this time I would ride Kixs. I was not ready to ride Kixs independently because at this point I could shut him down quicker from the lunge line than I could from the saddle. I had an assistant control Kixs on the lunge line while I rode him. He was great at the walk and trot, but as soon as I asked for the canter, he broke into bucking. Within two to three bucks we had him stopped and then we started again. Kixs only tried to buck twice before he willing went into the canter. We continued this exercise for the rest of the week.

**Week three:** Week three Kixs and I came off of the lunge line. By the end of week two, Kixs had walk, trot, and cantered under saddle without bucking, so it was time to take the next step. I must say I was nervous to see if Kixs would start bucking again once he felt the freedom of not being on the lunge line. Up to this point I had continued to lunge Kixs briefly on the lunge line before mounting. Some days he would come out quiet and walk, trot, canter without bucking. Other days he would come out bucking as soon as I asked for the trot. He was very unpredictable and I couldn't identify a pattern in why he would start bucking. Every day he was cinched up exactly the same, with the same tack, and the same lunging routine. It didn't matter if he had the day off the day before, nor did it matter if the weather was cool or hot. All I knew was that if he came out and quietly went into the trot, he was not going to buck that day.

I started my ride with some extra time at the trot to calm my nerves and to make sure that Kixs was relaxed. Riding a horse that bucks was not what worried me, it was that I knew the degree of his bucking and that he was a horse that wasn't going to stop until he lost his rider. As I asked for the canter Kixs stepped into stride without any hesitation and without any attempt to buck. I cantered for a couple of circles before I let him walk and gave him a pat on the neck. After a short break, I asked for the canter on the other lead and again he willing cantered without trying to buck. An overwhelming feeling of joy came over me because I had just made a major change in Kixs' attitude.

**Week Four through Eight:** Over the next five weeks, I continued to ride Kixs in the arena, in

the yard, in fields, on the road, and through the woods. I wanted Kixs to see that being ridden and cantering through fields could be fun. Every day I started with him on the lunge line to see how he felt that day. Some days he came out wanting to buck, others he came out as calm as could be.

Also during this week, I had his owner come out and ride him in lessons. I wanted to teach his owner how to lunge Kixs and how to control him when he wanted to buck. Kixs was a rock star, cantering around with his owner as if he had never had an issue. I checked in on Kixs a few months after he had returned home to hear that Kixs was still unpredictable from day to day on the lunge line but under saddle he was a gem. I checked in again a few months later and Kixs' owner had started riding Kixs without lunging him and he was doing great.

It is very gratifying to know that I had saved the life of a horse and rider by bringing them together through helping them to understand each other's needs. As a result, they developed a relationship that will be strong in everything that they do.