

Back in Texas

By Allison Griest

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Gabby and I showing Pony Hunter, before the bucking habit developed. Photo by Jim Stoner. This weekend I was able to visit my family in Texas. The main reason for the visit was to help my parents pack and get ready for their move. However, Saturday morning was reserved for a visit to my old barn.

Gabby Giggles, known as Gabby, Gabbers and Gabby Girl, has been my favorite pony since she came to my barn nine years ago. She's now 13 years old, and as I recently discovered, quite chunky!

Gabby and I have a colorful history. When I still lived in Texas, we'd go to fun shows where we'd win ribbons of every color, and we went on trail rides whenever the weather permitted. When she was about 5 or 6, she went through a phase where she ran me into the wall on every outside line we jumped. I remember a clinician thought that was the oddest thing she'd ever seen. We managed to work through it though. Inevitably, I've fallen off her several times, and we've both even gone down together before.

One of Gabby's many jobs is to help judge the guys I date. Studies show that when she pins her ears and lunges at a guy, he doesn't last more than a month. When she tolerates him, he gets to stick around for a bit longer. Of course, the smarter guys know to bring carrots, so she's probably not a fool-proof test.

For whatever reason, Gabby has developed a bucking habit over the last four or five years. According to the vet and chiropractor, she has nothing physically wrong with her—she just enjoys kicking her back legs up in the air.

Unfortunately, no one else at my barn really wants to ride a horse that's likely to buck, so she hangs out in the pasture without a job. She only bucks in the canter departure and when she lands after a fence. My solution? We don't jump anymore, and I ride western. I don't think there's any shame in grabbing the horn when she gets naughty!

However, Gabby seems to know that I won't tolerate her bucking. While I have been bucked off her countless times, I like to think I've finally figured out how to stay in the saddle. Of course, the real thing may be that I'm the only person at the barn silly enough to continually get on her back. Regardless, she's my mount of choice.

So I saddled Gabby up on Saturday and walked into the round pen. We've done a lot of longe work before, and I've found that a good five to ten minutes spent in the round pen makes for a wonderful ride. She usually gets a few bucks out of her system and focuses on me as the leader.

Gabby taking a break in the round pen to model for the camera. Typical. Photo by Allison Griest.

I took the bridle off my pony, she waited for me to cue her to the rail, and she started trotting around. The moment I asked for a canter, she kicked her heels up to the sky. This buck wasn't a cute little hop. Her entire body was engaged in bucking-glee. I couldn't help but laugh. Then I lowered my voice, told her to quit it and signaled her down to a walk. She bucked in the canter departure again when we changed directions. Then she was an angel. She followed me around the round pen for a bit, and then we headed to the arena.

I had a great ride, and she seemed to have fun. I know she had fun rolling after her bath. It's documented on video.

I don't know when I'll be down to Texas again, but she's always a fun part of the visit. If she wasn't so darn cute, maybe I'd be more inclined to move on and find a horse to love that didn't love to buck. However, I don't see that happening.

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