



### **The Rider Writes Archive One**

I'm a big fan of starting something new after forty, or thirty five, or whatever age you define as "middle age." It doesn't have to be something physical, like running a marathon. It can be something mental, like learning to play poker or reading science fiction. For me horseback riding accomplished both. You have to be in shape to ride, but even if you have some physical handicap, the horse has four good legs to help you. Learning the horse inside and out satisfies the mental side and takes every bit as much concentration as learning Texas Hold 'Em. And riding a horse is the hobby that keeps on giving.

A lot of people are surprised when they find out I have not been riding all my life. Most people who do what I do have been. Around the time I decided to learn to ride horses, one of the doctors in my group decided to quit riding. He was a team penner. So logically, I bought his horse and "learned" how to team pen. I didn't start with equitation. I took "lessons" from a patient of mine. A self proclaimed "rodeo rider," he took me out to a school yard near his home, put me on his back yard stud horse and forced me to gallop up and down a fence line. It's all a blur now, but I think he actually swatted the horse on his rump each time to get me started. He said I had to get over any fear of galloping, stopping dead and turning in order to team pen. After about six weekends of that, I was on my own. I started team penning.

I love that sport. Of all the horseback riding experiences, it is one of the most exciting. It's also a great spectator sport. A penning event is a little two minute vignette, a story about getting cows from one point to another using horses, just like old timey ranchers. I quit penning because my busy schedule made it hard to plan rides with other penners and keep a "team" together. I still love to watch it. If you've never watched team penning before, try to find an event locally, and go see it for yourself. Let me know what you think.

Not wanting to waste my newly acquired cattle working skills, I decided to try the working cow horse event. I had to sell my team penning horse, buy a new one, learn how to ride a reining horse and find myself a full time trainer. After two years of competing in the event, I ended up ranking nationally in the novice amateur class. And I learned a little about equitation in the process.

So try something new. Start reading books, learn a foreign language, ride a horse. My message is that you can do just about anything you set your mind and heart to, even after forty...with the exception of playing professional football. It's something I've always wanted to do...

