

The GREEN GRAY Mare

DAN HUBBELL



Kollin VonAhn and Apache R Hali

Heeler Kollin VonAhn took a chance and hit the jackpot.

By Mary McCashin

WHEN IT COMES TO SELECTING A TOP-NOTCH HORSE, MOST TEAM ropers select a horse based on experience, mannerisms and sheer talent. However, they don't always get that opportunity.

In 2013, Blanchard, Oklahoma, heeler Kollin VonAhn encountered a problem. His seasoned horse had come up hurt, and he was left with two options: draw out of the Red Lodge, Montana, pro rodeo or ride his green 6-year-old mare, Apache R Hali, aka "Hali."

The big gray mare was inexperienced and cold backed, and her mannerisms were definitely that of a mare. She had only been to one jackpot roping, but Kollin took a chance, and Hali excelled.

"I figured I at least knew her and if she messed up, I couldn't be mad at her because she was young, but she surprised me. She made it easy," he says.

Now, at just 8, Hali is Kollin's main mount.

She definitely has the bloodlines for the rodeo arena. Hali was bred by Mike Row of Tishomingo, Oklahoma, who won six AQHA amateur world championships in heading and heeling aboard Hali's sire, Apache Blue Boy. Hali's dam is a granddaughter of top cutting horse Playgun.

She stands 15.1 hands, making her a bit larger than the average heel horse.

"She feels like a little horse, though," Kollin says. "She's short coupled and really fast, but she's athletic and strong like a big horse."

And Hali certainly has her quirks.

"She dang sure acts like a mare!" Kollin says. "She's snorty, cold-backed, and she has no opposition to bucking you off if you don't warm her up really well. She has to ride in the back of the trailer so she can be the last one on and the first one off. I have to ride her consistently and just spend time with her, or she'll retaliate somehow. I'm hoping by the time she's 10 or 12, she'll be a little less mareish."

For all of her idiosyncrasies, Hali is already in demand.

"I've already had people contacting me about getting an embryo out of her," Kollin says. "I'm just not at the point where I'm willing to give her two months off to do that. Maybe in a few years when I have a solid, seasoned back-up horse, but for right now, it's on the back burner."

That solid, seasoned back-up horse is quickly becoming a reality in the form of Col Triangle Gold (Six Didget Col-Miss Triangle Sue by Triangle Gold War). The nine-year-old sorrel horse had been through a few team ropers' hands. Chase Tryan sold him to Travis Graves, Travis sold him to Kaleb Driggers, and then Kaleb and Kollin partnered on "Hock."

"Hali was lame, and I needed a horse, so Driggers and I decided to partner up on him," Kollin says. "I'd only ridden him once going into Cheyenne Frontier Days, and we ended

up winning the rodeo. I just trust him so much. We click really well, and he's so reliable. He's not flashy at all, but he's the same horse every run. We had some kinks to work out when I first got him, but now he feels really strong."

The two-time Wrangler National Finals Rodeo average champion and 2009 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association world champion is quick to point out that great horses don't come along all that often, but they're becoming more common.

"It's easier to find great horses now," he says, "maybe not finished ones, but great horses nonetheless. Through the breeding industry and the cutting horse industry, the quality of horses has just skyrocketed. When you get a good horse, or if you're lucky, a great horse, you have to take time, understanding and a heck of a lot of patience to make that horse last. I've ruined as many good horses as I've ever had by just going too hard and too fast. If you take your time, it'll increase your chances tenfold."

Taking that lesson to heart, Kollin tries hard to take good care of his horses on the rodeo road.

"I put up pens almost everywhere I go so that they can lay down and really rest," he says. "If I'm traveling, I try to stop every five or six hours so they can get off the trailer, move around and get a drink. I think the biggest mistake people can make is not allowing their horse time to rest. If you get to pushing one all season, they're going to suffer because of it, and so are your runs."

Kollin says he learned a lot about horses from his dad, but also from "just from riding and learning what did and didn't work. Each horse offers up a lesson. If each horse continues to have flaws, then you need to take a look in the mirror and figure out what you're doing wrong."

"You have to practice and condition your horse, but you also have to let them rest. Great horses are hard to come by; you have to be patient with them in their development and respect their try." 🐾

Kollin went into the National Finals Rodeo sitting in sixth place with \$79,024 in earnings. Although this issue of America's Horse went to press before the NFR occurred, you can check out our rodeo coverage at www.aqha.com/rodeo.

