

A Little Boy and His Horse

Dalton Hutcheson and his horse, Cheyenne, are a perfect match.

By Ginger Larson

Every one is looking for a perfect fit. A perfect pair of shoes. A perfect hat. A perfect ball glove.

Felicia, Dalton and Al Tharpe are grateful that Cheyenne is a part of their family. Dalton Hutcheson, 11, has found his perfect fit in a 29-year-old sorrel American Quarter Horse named Cheyenne. The boy and his horse complement each other like butter on a biscuit.

“Come here, old man,” Dalton teases Cheyenne in a southern twang.

Cheyenne responds easily to his master’s lead rope and stands calmly as he is bridled and saddled. Dalton pulls himself up in the saddle and sits tall and confident with bright red boots and a smile that could not be bucked off his face.

The duo is ready to take on the world... or at least a trail ride.

Cystic Fibrosis Therapy

A trail ride is a lot more appealing than what doctors normally prescribe for Dalton. Dalton, unfortunately, suffers from cystic fibrosis, which means he must take two different medications three times a day with a jet nebulizer, a machine that loosens the mucus in his lungs. Then he also straps on a therapy vest three times daily for 30 minutes, which gives percussions to his chest and back, explains his mother, Felicia Hutcheson.

“He never complains about it,” Felicia said. “They aren’t painful – just uncomfortable – as long as he thinks about something else.”

The vibrations from a horseback ride, though, give much the same effect as the treatments and allow Dalton to skip one of his therapy sessions. A horseback ride changes his grim expression to a grin.

Dalton is not the only one with a respiratory illness; Cheyenne has asthma. A retired hippo-therapy animal from Heroes on Horseback in Hilton Head, South Carolina, Cheyenne was at risk of being euthanized due to his age and medical condition. Linda Tharpe of Running Horse Ranch in Hagan, Georgia, received a call from a friend affiliated with Heroes on Horseback asking if she would take the horse as part of her rescue program. Linda agreed and moved quickly; if she had not, within a week, Cheyenne would have been gone.

Tharpe placed the horse on asthma medicine and a feeding regiment consisting of Seminole Senior Formula. Cheyenne’s allergies leveled out

quickly with the medicine and several people offered to buy him, Linda says. Dalton struggles to mount his horse, as Cheyenne waits patiently for his favorite rider.

Tharpe was waiting for a gut feeling from God, she says. "I was interested in finding Cheyenne a home for life."

Tharpe and her husband, Al, kept Cheyenne for six months as they waited for just the right person. One day, as the Tharpes were working with Reggie Cook, President of the American Heritage Rodeo Association, on a benefit rodeo for cystic fibrosis, the perfect conversation topic came up.

Cook mentioned that Dalton, his rodeo assistant, had wanted a horse since Boy Scout camp the previous summer but could not afford one due to medical expenses. Linda remembered Dalton from a carousel party she had hosted for church. It just clicked.

Cook and the Tharpes began to map out a plan to help Dalton afford a horse. Seminole Feed of Ocala, Florida, agreed to supply six months of feed, Reggie Cook furnished hay and a place for Cheyenne, Bill Morgan, a farrier in Daisy, Georgia, promised to supply hoof care and Dr. Keith Miller of Claxton, Georgia, volunteered veterinary care.

The package was complete. For Christmas 2003, Dalton and Cheyenne received the perfect gift... each other.

Since riding horses, Dalton has gained three pounds, a feat he had not done in four years. He also skips a treatment on the days that he rides. Dalton and Cheyenne

"It's been great for him. Health-wise, it helps him," Felicia says. "Cheyenne and Dalton take care of each other's respiratory problems."

Cheyenne doesn't need asthma medicine anymore. It could be the open air; it could be Dalton. Who knows?

"There is someone in this world for every horse," Linda says. "It's just a matter of time to find the person for that particular animal."

WitGinger Larsonh a perfect match like that, Dalton and Cheyenne will be blazing trails.

Ginger Larson is a senior at the University of Florida majoring in agricultural communications. She enjoys writing and photography and, of

course, cheering on the Gators.