

## The lesson of Jocko and the Kern River

Many years ago, when I was still a very green rider, I had a lot of friends down at the Rancho Rio stables in Bakersfield, located on the south side of the Kern River. Sometimes we would ride together along the river trail, and sometimes, when we couldn't find friends to ride with, we would just ride alone around the stables. Often we would ride a few miles up to Ethel's, drink beer, dance all night with everyone, and then ride back in the dark. I really miss those days.

I had a friend named Bud who had an awesome horse named Jocko. That big horse was built like a gorilla, and I always admired its conformation. I was talking to Bud one day about his horse and he said, "Hey, if you would like to ride Jocko around here, go ahead. Don't worry, he looks big and mean, but he's steady as they come. I've been hunting with Jocko, and I've actually shot my shotgun while I was riding him, and he didn't spook at all."

Well, that made me feel confident, so I felt good about taking Jocko for a ride. We zig-zagged through the stables at Rancho Rio until I think we were both getting bored. Feeling confident, I said, "Come on, Jocko, let's go cross the river."

I had crossed the river many times on my own horse, and even though the water was a little deep that year, I figured it would be no problem with Jocko. As we approached the water, he felt hesitant. He didn't want to take a step into the water, so just I talked to him, patted his neck and gently nudged him on. If he really freaked out, I figured I'd just take him back. No need to risk an accident. He didn't like it at first, but he slowly stepped in and we got across just fine; rode around the north side of the river a little, and then we crossed the river again, a little easier this time, and rode back to Bud's stall.

I told Bud where we went, and he looked absolutely shocked. "What? You took that horse into the river?" He was almost shouting in disbelief.

"Yes," I replied. "He was a little hesitant at first, but we made it just fine. Why? You said Jocko was really steady."

"Yeah, but I didn't think you were going to try to cross the river! That horse hates the water. He'll buck you off before he takes one step in it. I could never get him in the river. That's the only issue he has."

I was thinking, *why didn't you tell me that Bud!* But then, I realized Bud had figured I was just going to ride around the stables and not try anything stupid.

We all learned something that day:

— I had confidence in a horse based on the very convincing words of another person who seemed completely credible to me. But clearly, I didn't know one of the most important issues with that horse, and that's something I should have questioned before I ever got on him. As President Reagan once said, trust but verify. On the other hand, if Bud had warned me about Jocko's fear of water, I never would have tried to cross the river, which leads lesson number two:

— Good old Jocko learned the water is okay, if you're not pushed too hard to walk into it. I need not expound on the many applications of this.

— Perhaps most importantly, I think Bud, the more experienced rider, learned that sometimes the one thing you believe is impossible is not so impossible after all.