

REFLECTIONS

Introduction

As 2008 draws to a close, I have been pondering the year past: the ups and downs, twists and turns and the irritating fact that as I get older, each year passes more quickly than the last. It has been a bitter sweet affair with a pretty dismal start. In January I lost my beloved Baron, a week later our eldest German Shepherd Dog died. In the early spring, Nelson our one-eyed Barn Owl passed away and in June my other half's favourite hunting hawk, Ragnar died. It has to be said that all had lived full, active and very long lives but nevertheless their loss was most heart felt.

Not all was doom and gloom however as Faldero and I settled into a good basic training programme. The meteoric progress we made in 2007 proved just how much I needed to learn in order to bring on my youngster, and how ill-equipped I was at the task I had handed myself, so this year has been one of consolidation as we build our working relationship, but more of that another time. For now, though, a reflection on a girl's best friend.

Baron



Figure 1: Baron - May 2005

We had been together for 10 years. My local riding school wanted to retire him and I didn't need any persuading: a life-long dream of owning my own horse could finally be realised. Of course that was when the fun started as I happily if naively took Baron home. After all, I had my Level 1 Horse Ownership certificate, had been riding for a year: what could possibly go wrong? Never mind that in our first year he scared me half to death as he enthusiastically raced across the countryside, with me clinging on for dear life.

And that was where he was most happy. In another age I am convinced he would have made an excellent cavalry charger.

A confirmed hunter, he liked nothing more than a good cross-country hack out. He didn't need hounds to chase foxes as he was quite capable of chasing them himself. The first time I encountered this we were walking along a disused mineral tramway, part of which runs along the bottom of our garden, contemplating life in general, when a fox pops up on top of a hedge. Fox dashed off and Baron made to jump the hedge after him. At the time I put this down to us both being startled but several weeks later we saw another.

The fox was unaware of us to start with as he came down the bank and trotted off down the lane. Baron didn't need to be told. As I sat there open-mouthed, Baron seized the moment and took off after the fox – at this stage, with me still on board I have to say. The fox made good his escape of course, but Baron wouldn't stop and now I was terrified! A faint-hearted attempt to run him into a hedge had me backing off as he squared up to bank it! I somehow managed to bring him under control but my arms and legs ached so much they had turned to jelly and I burst into tears. Baron had obviously had a marvellous time: he was snorting and pawing the ground, which I came to learn later was his way of saying "God that was good – let's do it again!", but back then this was all too much and I wimped out and got off - BIG mistake. As I attempted to walk us



Figure 2: Baron - Sept 2007

back home, Baron snatched the reins away and took off up the lane on his own way home. I burst into more tears as I trudged after him. We were a good half-mile from home, not that far, but most of it was up a fairly steep hill. As I puffed and panted, my tears turned to irritation and then I got cross. Baron was going to be in for it when I got home, I told myself: how dare he behave like this!

I kept Baron with a good friend who lives about a mile from me. She has had horses all her life and was well used to green owners like me. Baron, being a creature of habit, put himself in his stable when he got back to the yard. Val watched from the kitchen window, smiling to herself, and told me afterwards I looked really comical as I stormed past the house toward the barn. She thought at first that Baron had un-seated me and we both collapsed in howls of laughter as I recounted the events of the morning when everything had calmed down.

Anyway, as I strode purposefully into the barn, determined to give Baron what for, I suddenly stopped dead in my tracks. Baron stood there, looking at me with his big shiny black eyes, head stretched out towards me, tilted to one side, lower lip wobbling. With an apology like that apart from flinging my arms round his neck, what else could I do? We both learned very important lessons that day. Baron, that he could get away with murder by just tilting his head to one side and looking all doe-eyed and me that I had not put into place that which I had learned for my Horse Owner's certificate. In short – I should've known better. Baron was around 13 or 14 when I bought him and had been at the riding school for around 8 years. In that time he had been there, done that: show jumping, dressage, eventing and more importantly for him – hunting. I had taken him home, away from all this and firm friends too into a strange environment, different yard routine, new friends. Not only that, but we rode out alone. His behaviour was telling me that he had no intention of hurting me, was OK with being ridden, happy enough in his new home but he was nervous and upset in his new surroundings. I was embarrassed.

For the next few weeks, Baron and I hacked out in company until he started to get used to what was around him. He would still chase after foxes and we would still have very spirited, sometimes slightly out of control rides cross-country but we were getting used to each other and over the years had the most terrific fun, forming a real partnership. We were very good friends. I could turn our life together into a book but now, I need to bring my story to a close.

Footnote



Figure 3: Faldero - Summer 2006

Faldero came into my life in October 2006 as I realised another life-long dream of owning a Spanish horse. Therein lays another book! Baron came to live with Faldero at St Piran's in 2007 and enjoyed a wonderful semi-retirement that sadly only lasted for a year. As I came to terms with the enormity of the task of owning, training and riding a young horse and realising that my riding left a little to be desired to say the least, Baron was there to give me the confidence I needed.

In an all too short summer, I had a glimpse of the horse I never knew I had and the experiences we missed because I never realised just how talented he was. I like to think I am a better person and rider because of it.

In the months since his passing I have grown a lot closer to Faldero. Not in the sentimental sense, but starting to work and ride with the same spirit I did with Baron. Beginning to relax, accepting what's given, and enjoying the moment. In return Faldero has grown more trusting of me and as we work more together, he seems to afford me a little more respect.

Yes, as I look back over our time together, it is through rose tinted glasses. Of course there were some bad times, but as Baron passes into legend as all good heroes do, those times are least remembered and I remember him with joy, great love and affection – my life enriched by his presence within it. Now I have Faldero, and a new partnership is forming. If my relationship with Baron is anything to go by, the next 10 years are going to be wonderful indeed.

Chris Hall
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