

## CHOOSE YOUR TRAVEL MATES WISELY: CHESTER DENNIS

The overall goal of our program is to get people good enough to go out on their own and be successful at cutting. So when they are travelling to shows, it is important to know what they need for the trip and how to handle different situations on the road. This is a true story about a road trip with me for a real novice, a client and friend named Chester Dennis from Santa Rosa, California. Wayne Wallace from Sanders, AZ was sponsoring a \$2k added contest open and nonpro divisions. That was a large purse in 1974 for any NCHA contest. Chester decided that he wanted to show, even though he hadn't ridden much and was 62 years old at the time. Never the less, he was ready to take on the best in the world that weekend... he may have been a little overconfident.

So, Chester and I take off from Oakdale, CA, heading for Sanders, AZ, 25 miles from Gallup, NM. We were down by Bakersfield when Chester asked if I had the health papers on Doc's Tule Lu and Doc's Ginger Bar, the two mares we were going to be showing. I told him, no Chester, I don't have them, the mares belong to you and you should have gotten them yourself prior to our trip. Chester became very alarmed so I told him not to worry, we would get the papers in Bakersfield. I started to talk to him about cutting and before he knew it, we were past Bakersfield heading for Needles near the border...and the health inspection station. I assured Chester that we could get the papers in Needles even though I knew the vet from Blythe only came to Needles once a week. When we arrived in Needles, no one was there, and Chester asked me what we were going to do. I replied that we were going on to Sanders regardless, and NOTHING was going to stop us.

As we approached the check station, I pulled over and told Chester that he was going to have to take the mares out of the trailer, walk them out far enough in the desert to get by the station, and I'd meet him on the other side with the trailer. It was very dark that night, so I assured him that we'd get away with it, no problem. He didn't like that idea very much and when he began to protest, I reminded him of the fact that they were his mares, and it was his fault for not bringing the papers, and we were not going to stop now after coming this far.

As luck would have it, Jim Masters, a man who cowboied for the Starlight Ranch (another client of mine) was on duty. (I actually did have the health papers in my pocket – unbeknownst to Chester). Jim and I exchanged greetings, I told him about Chester, and the prank I'd been playing on him and asked him to play along with me. Jim had a good laugh, then waved Chester in. As Chester came up to us, I told Jim loudly, "I don't care about the lousy papers or you! I'm going through and we're putting the mares up at the fairgrounds for the night, and in the morning we're going on to Sanders to the show." Jim told us that we would NOT be crossing Arizona without those papers. I said, "The only way you will keep us from going to the fairgrounds and taking care of our horses tonight will be to shoot us!" At that point, Jim pulled out his .45 and said he would be glad to shoot anyone breaking the law on his watch.

Chester went crazy, and started begging for my life. I then turned and walked out, and Jim said that if we put those mares up at the fairgrounds, he would impound them for 30 days. I yelled back, "You can kiss my #\*!?! That's where we're going!" Chester frantically asked me what we were going to do, and I told him the same thing. Chester said, "But he's going to impound my horses!" "Not for long," I told him, "I have a friend who owns a hardware store

in town, and as soon as we get us a room, we're going to go buy some bolt cutters for the morning, then we're going on to Sanders, end of story."

After we checked into our room, I told Chester I was going in to town to get the bolt cutters – I really went to the local bar and had a beer. An hour later, I returned to the room and told Ches that I had them, we were all set. I got up real early the next morning, went to the fairgrounds, loaded the horses, and met Chester back at the motel. I told him that I had cut the locks off the pens, and we'd better make a run for it before Jim found out. Chester was scared to death all day, thinking we were going to be captured and hauled off to jail!

I never told Chester that I had the papers all along, and he got a lot of mileage out of that story with all his friends over the years. It was a great adventure for him, bucking the law, having a gun pulled on him, and finally getting away! Chester and I made a lot of trips together after that. One of my greatest moments was winning the 1974 NCHA Futurity on Doc's Yuba Lea for him. I guess the point of this story is, know what you need to prepare for your trip, and just as importantly, know your travelling companions well.

Til next time, cut clean, quit clean and have as much fun as you can in the middle!