

## Disaster Ahead

*By Suzy Hopkins*

It was already an unusual day at the immense boarding stable where we kept our horses. There was a noisy horse show going on 500 feet from the cavernous indoor ring where I was working my horse Zaboe with my daughter Tina riding. Outside, 100+ horses and their riders were assembled around the huge outdoor ring waiting for their classes to begin. At that time I was caring for Sir Jerry, a 1,200 lb. palomino stallion. That day I had clipped his halter to the hot walker just outside the back of the indoor ring to provide him some exercise. The hot walker has four arms that rotate around the center post driven by a small motor. Sir Jerry figured out if he stood still the hot walker would continue to rotate thereby pulling his halter off. One time when I glanced over to the hot walker I saw the halter going around by itself. God no! I yelled at Tina, "Right now, ride Zaboe out the gate to where Sir Jerry must be to cut him off from the horse show!" She galloped over to the gate. After several frantic tries she got the gate open and got Zaboe to go through. Zaboe and Sir Jerry were friends because Zaboe always submitted to the stallion as he would have done in a wild herd, so I thought Zaboe's presence could help in this situation.

I ran to the hot walker, grabbed the halter and followed Sir Jerry's path in sheer terror. A huge stallion can be extremely dangerous as they have many independent thoughts – breed the mares, boldly fight with the other horses and stop any human that gets between those targets.

Fortunately Sir Jerry hadn't gotten far. He was absorbed visiting with a mare through the fence in a paddock behind the indoor ring. Gratefully, he hadn't noticed all the horses at the show 500 feet away. It could have been a horrible mess because a loose stallion will mount a mare with a rider crashing his front feet into the back of the unfortunate person. He will also challenge any horse in his way and will determinedly try to form a herd with any horses in the vicinity regardless of what the riders try to do. Stallions' instincts are intense which shrinks their brains.

I came up to him with the halter and he pushed me away not wanting to be distracted from the mare or be caught by me. I had heard his owner say, "Never mind, never mind." to Sir Jerry whenever he got lost in the scent of a mare. I calmly repeated, "Never mind, never mind, never mind." Abruptly, amazingly, his eyes glazed over, he remembered his training and I got the halter back on. Right there, right then I was thankful for my many years of training horses that kept me calm around them.