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A Rare Budenny Finds Her Cowboy

by Karina Rapp



Fiery and proud, Kinaja is an exotic little ten-year-old mare who shines like a copper penny in the ring.

Emboldened by the courage of young seventeen-year-old Hunter Anderson, her favorite rider, Kinaja charges merrily over any fence she's pointed at and attacks the course with a spring in her step. That fighting spirit is in her blood: she is a Budenny, a Russian cavalry horse.

If you haven't heard of the breed, you are not alone. Kinaja is a rarity, one of only eight registered Budennies in all of the Americas. Sadly, a broken back at five almost ended whatever her future might have been. But this little mare is the queen of second chances.

Love at First Sight

I first met Kinaja in the midst of an Idaho winter, deep in the heart of mountainous McCall, a town of skiing fame. Fluffy and seven months old, she had been placed in a round pen for our viewing. Despite being recently weaned, she was not in the slightest bit distressed and seemed quite happy with her independence. Thus far this was only one of two available Budenny fillies in the whole country, and I had my sights set on the idea of raising a rare breed mare for future competition and breeding.

In that small pen, this calm, curious and relatively wild filly walked right up to me and began to nuzzle my hair. Up until that week, she had been running free with her herd across several hundred acres of mountain pasture. The intelligence in her eyes took my breath away. What settled it was the pre-purchase exam. We had no trouble getting her into a squeeze chute, and once contained she stood like she had always known how to stand: for shots,



Author Karina Rapp finds her special Budenny filly Kinaja in Idaho, the winter of 2008.

Courtesy Karina Rapp

blood work and a full exam. This horse had both brains and beauty. I was hooked, on her and on the Budenny breed.

I took her home with me to southern California as soon as the weather permitted. Over the course of the next three years, she went with me to college in Santa Barbara and I trained her on my own with the guidance of some wonderful trainers. I was the typical horse-poor college student, biking to the stables and working for trainers in exchange for board. I had luck on my side and met many terrific people who helped us on our journey. Kinaja was affectionate and wildly intelligent, but she was strong under saddle and she had confidence in spades—certainly a difficult combination with an opinionated red mare!

After college, I took her home to Temecula, California and sent her to a proper hunter/jumper trainer for finishing. Everything was going well. She was riding and jumping nicely, and we were preparing her for a rare breed exhibition at the Pomona Horse Expo. She was five years old and on top of her game.

Twists of Fate

In late November of 2012, just a few days before I was scheduled to pick Kinaja up, she was involved in a terrible accident. She had completely flipped over backwards in the cross-ties and fallen on hard ground. X-rays revealed three severed spinous processes of her vertebrae, and two additional spinous fractures—an injury commonly known as “broken withers.” Devastated about her 50-percent chance of recovery, I pastured her for a year. With the



This x-ray reveals Kinaja has “broken withers” and it shows the three severed spinous processes of her vertebrae.

Courtesy Karina Rapp

vet's approval, she was then sent to a rehab trainer. But Kinaja was not ready; she was resistant and not interested in listening to anyone. Some thought she had suffered a minor brain injury during the fall. I was at a loss. So many dreams had been nurtured over the last six years, all crushed in an instant.

It was at this point that my good friend Dr. Margo Saunders, another Budenny enthusiast, stepped in and offered to take her on as a broodmare. I trusted Margo and agreed. Kinaja was sent to Serenity Pastures & Stables in Rupert, Idaho, Margo's retirement and rehabilitation barn.

In 2014, two years after the initial accident, Kinaja was pasturing in beautiful, rural Rupert, just three hundred miles away from her birthplace. After several unsuccessful attempts at breeding, an in-depth ultrasound revealed hemorrhagic cysts in her ovaries. They were so severe that they had essentially replaced both of her ovaries.

Margo is known to her friends as the person who steps in when others give up. An internal medicine doctor at Minidoka Memorial Hospital, she dedicates her free time and generosity to helping others in need. Kinaja's history didn't faze her. Her equine rehab and retirement facility is filled with the old and the lame, and a surprising number of the lame gradually work their way to soundness after some time in her care. She attributes this to good pasture and quality hay, but a lot of love and attention go into the horses at SPS, too.

Without the prospect of breeding, Margo decided to do what she does best: rehab the horse that no one else knew what to do with. After a careful winter of conditioning and flat exercises, Kinaja appeared eager to go back to work. She had had enough time off, thank you, and she was ready for her next adventure. In the spring of 2015, Margo sent her to Sally Parks of Parkwood Equestrian Center, the owner and head trainer of one of the best hunter/jumper training and sales barns in Idaho. With Margo and Sally's combined patience and skill, Kinaja was brought back into the world of competition, this time as a prospective show jumper.

And this, my friends, is where it gets really interesting. If not for Hunter Anderson, a seventeen-year-old rodeo star from Pocatello, Idaho, she would have reached—yet again—the end of her long list of chances. After being at Parkwood for a year, Kinaja was nearing the end of her time there. Her first show, at the 2016 Northwest Spectacular in Bend, Oregon, garnered her reserve champion in the 0.70m Beginning Jumper division with assistant trainer Nadia Tanner in the saddle, but she was hard to sell to potential buyers. Kinaja had a penchant for tricky rabbit leaps deep at the base of each jump, and she wasn't the easiest or best prospect in a barn full of classy imported Warmbloods and high-bred show-stoppers. She had come a long way at Parkwood, but it would likely take many more years to work out all the kinks.

Margo considered the options: take her home and hope that she could find a buyer outside of the sale barn, or sell

her for next to nothing. Kinaja was too nice a mare for either option; she had the papers to prove it, and the brains and talent to warrant it. She just needed one last chance, and a particular kind of rider, to reach her full potential. Margo didn't want to see her end up at the bottom of the barrel. So, she waited and waited, until fortune brought a unique opportunity both for the horse and for a sweet young man.

Meanwhile, in Rodeo Country...

Idaho is a ruggedly beautiful state characterized by swaths of green farmland, dramatic mountains and enough waterfalls to justify naming multiple large cities with a moniker that includes the word "falls." (Idaho Falls, the location of Parkwood Equestrian Center, is one of many.)

The vast majority of Idaho horse owners keep their animals on their own property, even two minutes' walk from the heart of some downtowns. Keeping horses in Idaho is not a statement of wealth, it's a result of the local farming culture. Money is tight for many, but the small-town vibes of communities that pull together in difficult times are strong. The people are friendly, with a little country roughness, and Western riding

is predominant. Rodeos, livestock fairs, 4-H events and town parades all witness a healthy local turnout. The average folk think nothing of trailering their mounts to the City of Rocks Regional Park and other breathtaking locations for a little Sunday ride. Markers and trail heads for parts of the original Oregon Trail weave all over the state, and one does not need to try very hard to "get away from it all" and envision a trip back into the "old west."

Hunter Anderson is the epitome of a young Idahoan. The seventeen-year-old high school senior currently lives in Pocatello on a small ranch with his family. Hunter started riding at age nine, when he met a school friend whose family bred and sold horses.

His passion for competition in the Western world began later, when he met the leader of the local 4-H team. While competing in 4-H, he was encouraged to join his high school rodeo team. Once on the team, he discovered a love for team roping and reined cow horse events. He likes these events because of "the thrill of the speed needed to compete," he says. He also enjoys the camaraderie of his friends and watching the bull and saddle-bronc riding.

With a strong talent for horse riding, a can-do spirit and a dedicated work ethic, he trained his own rodeo horse from the ground up at age twelve. "I bought Diablo when he was just a yearling," he recalls. "In high school rodeo, Diablo and I compete in team roping, 'head or heel' and reined cow horse." He also barrel races Diablo at local jackpots (a less intense event than a full-fledged rodeo), and competes with him in other rodeos and shows.

In a short amount of time, Hunter's hard work paid off. In 2016, he won his first belt buckle for success in high



Hunter Anderson and his rodeo horse Diablo.

Ed Anderson

school reined cow horse classes. That success allowed him to compete in the Idaho High School Rodeo Association's state finals. This past summer, he also accumulated enough points over the course of three shows to earn his second buckle, this time in the over-all showman category.

Hunter discovered jumping and English riding because of a girlfriend; it was an activity that they could do together and he says that it looked like fun. "My favorite thing about jumping," he says, "is that it makes me feel closer and more connected with the horse. The hardest thing to learn was pushing my heels down and counting my strides."

He began his lessons at Parkwood Equestrian Center in 2016, hauling his rodeo horse Diablo an hour to the facilities from his home pasture. Sally Parks saw promise in the young cowboy and began looking for ways to get him on a jumper he could grow and learn with.

An Unexpected Pair

Sally is beloved by her clients for her uncanny ability to assess horse and rider potential, and to draw it out. She paired Hunter and Kinaja in November of 2016. The rodeo star and the spirited redhead clicked instantly. "She was going to challenge my riding skills and I knew in the long run that she would make me a better rider," Hunter says about his initial assessment of the little mare.

When Margo and Sally told me about Hunter, I was intrigued. Here was a kid with enough gumption and determination to see Kinaja through her tough moments, someone who wouldn't give up on her in favor of a newer, easier ride. After my own college days as

both horse poor and horse crazy, I could really appreciate a young person willing to put in the time and effort when the expense of full training wasn't an option.

Amazingly, Kinaja was visibly happier and more relaxed with Hunter. She had definitely found her special person. Because of my friendship with Margo, she was kind enough to allow me a say in where Kinaja ended up and we decided unanimously to give her to Hunter for a symbolic one dollar.

It was an easy decision for us to make. A five-acre grass pasture with other horses, a dedicated young rider with enough courage to meet Kinaja on her

own terms, and a family willing to support them with weekly lessons at Parkwood and the occasional show—what could be better?

"I kept thinking, why would someone choose me to give their horse to? I was quite amazed and shocked when I found out that she was going to be mine," Hunter says of this very special gift.

Jumping into the Ribbons

Jumpers is a great fit for both Hunter and Kinaja. Hunter still has much to learn and improve on, but he has an unflappable approach to jumping that sets the mare at ease. Despite the brazen overconfidence that often made her a difficult horse in the past, she genuinely looks to Hunter for reassurance. Together the pair has developed a unique style of jumping that suits them, one that will smooth out as they improve and learn together.

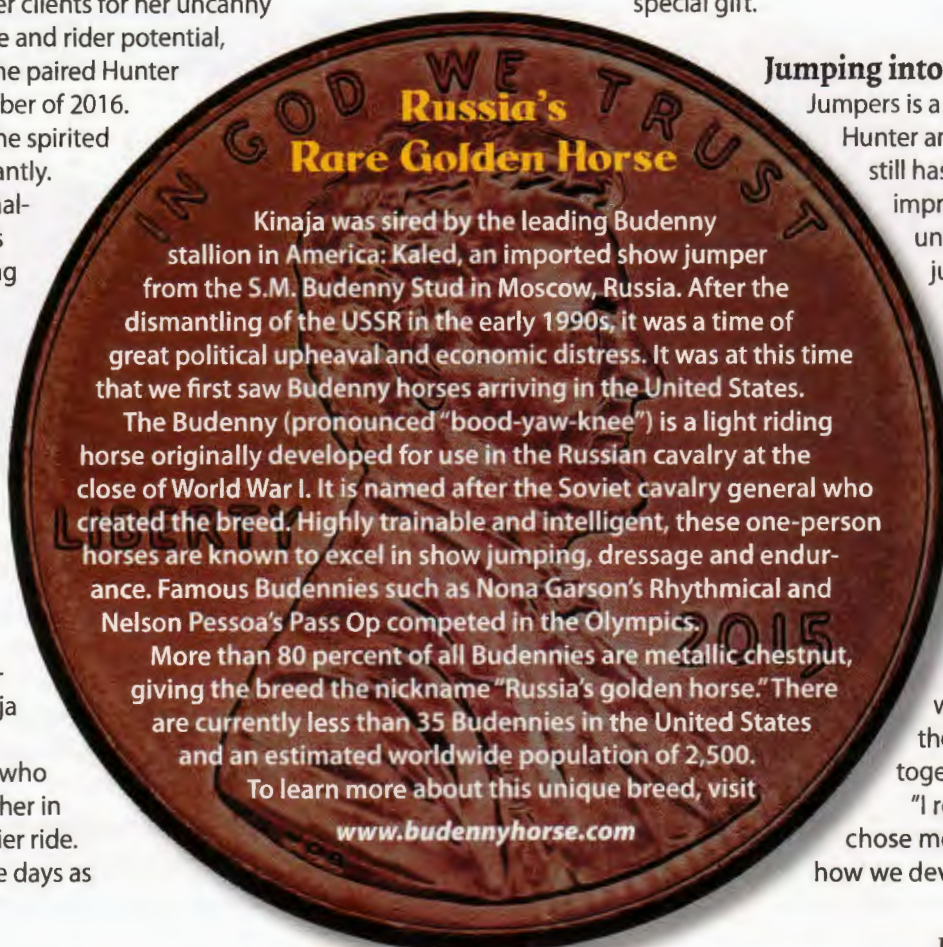
"I really love how she chose me to be her rider and how we developed a connection



Left: Hunter and Kinaja began forming a partnership at Parkwood Equestrian Center. **Right:** Hunter and Kinaja at the Treasure Valley Classic, Nampa, Idaho.



Photos by Darcy Anderson



together," he says. "She loves to eat bananas and insists on checking out all her surroundings, including crowds. She also knows how to bow. I was told that Budenny horses were bred to be cavalry mounts and that these horses always chose their riders. I heard many individuals tried to ride her in the past and she was never consistent. Her personality clashed with many, too."

In May of 2017, Hunter attended his first hunter/jumper show, officially joining the supportive Parkwood Equestrian show team. His entire family was in attendance; they braved a few rainy days with their fold-up chairs and umbrellas, and he had one of the biggest cheering sections on the hillside overlooking the ring. At the Treasure Valley Classic in Nampa, Idaho, he and Kinaja took grand champion in the 0.70m jumpers and reserve champion in the 0.75m Jumpers. This after less than a year of jumping for Hunter, and only six months working with the challenging mare.

At home, Kinaja lives with his family's two other horses in a five-acre pasture; she is especially keen on his rodeo mount, Diablo. Hunter keeps up her training in between lessons by



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Hunter and Kinaja took grand and reserve champion at the Treasure Valley Classic in Nampa, Idaho, this past summer.

working on flatwork and the exercises he learns at Parkwood. He also takes her to his 4-H events as his jumper. This summer, they competed and won their classes and qualified for the 4-H finals in the state.

"The biggest struggle when riding Kinaja is her huge stride," Hunter says. "She doesn't have the ability to collect as needed. I have noticed that she requires a confident rider to be able to jump well and I feel she needs guidance. We must work together to ride well."

"Overall my goals, right now and for the future," he continues, "are to keep progressing as a rider and with her training, so that we can participate in higher level classes over time. I hope to learn more from Kinaja and to advance my skills, so that I can apply them to other horses."

Has this Western rodeo star been converted? Perhaps. He now says that his favorite activity is jumping and his dream job is to be a professional jumper. Kinaja overcame a winding path to find her destiny. She is happiest when jumping with Hunter, and it is clear that they are a true team, ready to take on whatever the future may bring. **WT**



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