

# Chistoso's Relief

Red Dirt Choctaws – Spanish Mustnags, Wellston, OK 74881  
[www.reddirtchoctaws.com](http://www.reddirtchoctaws.com) email: [jsmith@reddirtchoctaws.com](mailto:jsmith@reddirtchoctaws.com)



## Chistoso, a 15 yo Spanish Mustang...

Outwardly appeared to be in excellent health without any visible distress or ailments. He passed his Veterinary inspection for Health to participate in competitive eventing at a local competition, and had no negative report from his long-time farrier during his regular trimming days before. Chistoso willingly performed and attempted everything he was asked to do on the ground in hand and under saddle...

But something just was not right.

Chistoso, although eager to please, was missing lead changes and his transitions were exaggerated where they should be smooth considering his extensive Dressage training and background. Despite the communication barrier he and his rider had, considering her lack of dressage/English riding technique and cues, there was something off about Chistoso. Structurally he was sound, and he'd been given a green light to compete, so we loaded up and headed out to spend the next week competing in horsemanship, low jumps and various

## From the sky arrived an Angel...

Very cliché' I know, but from what Chistoso and I experienced, I firmly believe her to a blessing and a gift from God. On the drive to the barn I picked up Ms. Gabriela McAllister from the Will Rogers World Airport. Little did I know the path our lives were about to take!

## *The Meeting*

Being in the line of work I am in, I naturally meet a lot of folks online. Yes, to answer the first question I am always asked, YES...it can be very scary and it is of utmost importance to be diligent in protecting yourself and researching people you are considering meeting. That being said, I picked up Ms. McAllister and we immediately fell into sync, grabbing a coffee like old friends before heading out to meet Chistoso at the barn.

Before going any further I would like to point out that the reason for Ms. McAllister's visit was not to work with Chistoso, she was here on a mission of her own to meet her own horses people and discuss steps for his future. That being said, we pulled up at the barn and were greeted immediately by Chistoso!

Gabriela immediately picked up on Chistoso's discomfort but did not pry to his issues. Again, she was here for a little holiday and not for work, she was a woman on a mission! After some time she could not deny his pain any longer and began to ask questions and make comments about his health, completely unprompted and spot-on to what I had been witness to and was told about his life prior to coming to RDC.



In keeping with tradition of the competition we were participating in, Chistoso and I saddled up to take a guided tour of the grounds with the other competitors. After our short ride, we cooled off, unsaddled, and settled Chistoso in for the evening and left to gather the remaining supplies needed for the week.

We headed to our hotel to check in and grab some dinner after dropping off the supplies at the barn and checking on Chistoso. I could tell Ms. McAllister was exhausted after being up and flying most of the day so I dropped her at the hotel and went to check Chistoso one last time. It was extremely hot in the barn so we opted to take a walk around the grounds to cool out. Chistoso was his normal goofy self and an absolute gentleman, settling nicely when we returned to the barn.

## New day, New realizations...

Following a big breakfast, Gabriela and I headed to the barn to check on Chistoso and watch a few events we were not participating in for the day. Upon arrival, things changed. Gabriela could no longer ignore that Chistoso needed more help than he was letting on. She was immediately drawn to Chistoso's wither area as a source of immense discomfort, something akin to having a knife stuck between your shoulder blades and trying to row a boat. My boy, needed help!



Chistoso, in his honorable and willing nature, had masked all this pain and had been continually pushing through each ride despite the pain he felt. I was a bit overwhelmed and had no idea what to do next. Gabriela looked at me, asked a few questions about his history, discovering he'd had a longstanding issue with saddle fit and said she could help. Thank God! But how?!

I'll admit, I'm a skeptic, I am very open to all types of medicine and practices, I know each form has its place in this world...but nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to witness with my own eyes and ears.

## Seeing & Believing...

The three of us, Chistoso, Gabriela, and myself walked back to his stall in the big barn. I decided to give them space, as I had no idea of what to expect from what she called a "session". I busied myself cleaning water buckets and putting out hay and cleaning the stall while Gabriela quietly placed her hands on Chistoso.

At this point, I feel the need to make note that Chistoso is not a fan of being touched by anyone, especially strangers, he is particular on whom he lets in his "circle of trust".

After watching from a distance, trying not to intrude on her work or distract from what was happening with questions about what was taking place, I noticed a distinct popping noise, akin to the snapping of small tree branch. At this



time I could no longer contain my curiosity and let slip, “what was that?!” Gabriela explained to me the process of how the kinetic energy adjusts the alignment of the spine in a manner such as a chiropractor would, but without all the physical twisting, turning, stretching and especially the pain. Chistoso never even flinched as she continued to work, he stood quietly and munched his hay and seldom cocked an ear to inquire of her antics as Gabriela moved about.



As she moved from his front shoulders to his croup area a look of pain came across her face and she looked at me questioningly. I immediately knew the question and filled her in on a little of Chistoso’s previous life before coming to Red Dirt. He was taught at an early age to do various “tricks”, bowing, rearing, and the like. Many he had not performed in several years as he was beginning to show signs of some soreness, but nonetheless, the damage had been done. My poor guy was harboring such a massive amount of pain and doing a fine job of it. He never balked at being asked to perform, he just pushed ahead and did the very most he could.



Continuing with the session, I knew he had suffered a long battle with white-line disease from a year before coming into my care. He still has some residual side effects that continue to make his hooves split and crack and need to be kept trimmed on a short 4-week rotation. Gabriela found heat in all four feet and spent some time there. As she worked Chistoso’s breathing began to become more relaxed, to the point he gave a huge sigh, dropped his head and closed his eyes in total contentment. Relief, pure and simple! What courage and grit this horse has to willingly do anything he is asked while on the inside his body is screaming. I just wanted to cry, to hug Chistoso, to hug Gabriela...

And then she turned and said, “Grab your saddle and let’s go out and see how he goes.” My first thought was, no way woman, he’s finally comfortable, no way am I going to throw a saddle on and hop on him now!..... But alas, I grabbed my Mustang Softride saddle and began to saddle my boy.

## I immediately realized something was different...

My saddle no longer fit! I had to adjust everything, the cinch, the breast collar, even my stirrups were off kilter. This was just all too weird for me, but I got in the saddle and we took our first steps.....and I began to laugh!

If you’ve ever put socks or tape on a cat’s feet and turned them loose to walk you know exactly what I am talking about when I say Chistoso walked as though I’d put socks on him. With his movement no longer restricted by the constant aches and pains and he could move freely. He was just as nervous as I was about this newfound relief, but he moved out nicely and we walked over to a grassy area to do some circles. As Gabriela asked us to take out at a canter I looked at her concerned, “he doesn’t exactly canter, at least not with a rider, and on the ground it’s a huge effort, are you sure about this?”..... I got the look and a nod, “he’s just fine, he feels great and he will be perfect.” I said a little prayer, got a good hold with my legs in anticipation of the huge leap he’d always taken to transition to a canter, and cued him up.

## Smooth and Effortless

It was as if we were walking, he never bobbed, just smooth as glass from a standstill took out into a canter like it was second nature. Holy crap! And he felt so good, I could feel how excited he was with being able to move about without pain. It was like he was 4 again; he wanted to go! Uphill, downhill, jump a little ditch... I had never felt such excitement within him, there was nothing he couldn’t do!

Chistoso and I continued to explore his new freedom of movement for the next 20 minutes then decided to head back to the barn and settle back in for the night. Upon removing the saddle I noticed that under the pad where normally it would have had areas where it would be dry there were absolutely none. Where the saddle sat it was completely wet, the saddle perfectly contacted his back! Spanish Mustangs are traditionally hard to fit saddle wise, but this guy was an exceptionally hard fit and we'd opted to go bareback as a result. We were both content in doing so and loved the freedom, but knowing that his saddle fit him now, this was the finishing touch on me no longer being a skeptic. This chic, she's the real deal!



We competed for 4 days at the US Cavalry Competition & Bivouac. Chistoso was comfortable and happy throughout our event and even competed in a couple events we had previously decided to decline entrance to. He was fabulous, without a doubt! Since arriving home he has continued to improve. He is much more attentive and alert to his surroundings and the other horses. He plays constantly with the younger horses and just seems overall so much more content and peaceful. I don't know how our event would have played out without her help, Gabriela brought relief and new joy to my precious boy and I could never begin to repay her the kindness. Is it worth it to step outside your comfort zone and what you know and try something new to help your four-legged family....absolutely!

All I have left to say....Gabriela, I'm a believer!

