



**NATALIE  
SMITH**

## *He gives new meaning to 'Old Paint'*

**O**wning a pony is the dream of a lot of children, especially young girls. The romantic notion of galloping across an open field — maybe the English moors — feeling the wind in your face and the horse's strength below you ... boy, just writing those words takes me back to being a 9-year-old.

Truth is, most of us don't end up with a pony. Our interests move on to other romantic things, most often boys.

But Kyley Hellhake held on to her love. A lifelong resident of Downingtown ("I've lived in the same house my whole life"), Kyley got her first pony when she was 5 and has been riding and competing ever since. And while the 23-year-old's family currently has four horses, there is one animal that has Kyley's heart.

Chincoteague Minnow is a pony that had a rough start in life. Rescued from a bad situation by the Nelsons of Chester Springs, he's "on loan" to Kyley, who has helped take him from a starved, neglected and skittish animal to one who's not only "fat and happy" but is also the young woman's partner in mounted games riding. The intense sport has pony and rider doing a variety of activities that involve props and trick riding.

Initially, training Minnow wasn't easy. The pony was afraid of everything used in the games - balloons, cones, things that made noise. But slowly and surely, through a technique called the Parelli method, used to build trust, and a book called "Trickometry," which gives instructions on training ponies, Minnow came out of his shell.

His first trick? Giving Kyley a kiss, naturally.

Minnow isn't a one-trick pony. He shakes hands, has "yes" and "no," bows, takes hats off heads and items out of pockets, backs up and stays on command.

But Minnow's most impressive trick? He's an artist.

Yep, the pony actually takes brush in mouth and paints to canvas.

Kyley herself is a photographer and is new owner of Studio 3, the fine art and framing shop in Downtown, so art is never far from her mind.

"I wanted to teach him something new," Kyley explained. "I like art. I saw horses that draw with markers. So I thought, 'Why can't he paint?'"

One very cold day last January, Kyley didn't feel like riding but was up for a challenge. She got out an easel, set it up with a blank canvas, got out the paints and put the brush in Minnow's mouth. With a little guidance, he was happily painting away.

"He just loves it," Kyley said.

The abstract works are available for purchase and the woman-and-pony team will incorporate color schemes on request. The largest paintings Minnow's turned out so far are 15-by-20 inches.

How does the pony know when he's finished a painting? "If he puts so much paint on it he can't fit anymore or he drops the brush and walks away," Kyley said, laughing.

*To see the works of Chinco-teague Minnow, visit [www.ponypaintings.com](http://www.ponypaintings.com).*

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