



WEEK-END RIDES

Meet Sally—and a Golden Filly Foal

SALLY is the Major's mare. This description, being written in horse-lovers' shorthand, may not make all the facts clear to everyone. The Ordinary Person, as distinct from the Horselover, may not, for instance, gather from those five words that Sally is a bay standing sixteen hands, deep in the shoulder, full in the chest, long, round, and roomy in the barrel; that she is five years of age and that until a couple of months ago when she injured a fetlock in the paddock she had a private reputation of being the best 'chasing mare in the province (next season the Major intended to hunt her, intended to show them all something; that her ears are tall and pointed, but not too tall and pointed; that her face has a small blaze and an amusing triangle over the near nostril; that the Major can go to the fence and call "Sally-girl!" just once and Sally comes at a canter, not at a walk; and, finally, that she has a swinging walk from which she skips with a queer sideways lurch into a perfect slow, smooth, and mile-covering canter.

I know, because I rode her on Sunday; besides, I can read horse-lovers' shorthand.

* * *

The fetlock is still big; expert opinion is that Sally won't fly any more fences; light hacking, with a light weight, yes; but "I couldn't put my weight on her," said the Major.

"Man, what a wonderful brood mare she'd make!" said the vet.

The words were taken up, an exclamation became a suggestion, the Major and all his friends began to talk blood lines and breeding, to ask questions all round the country, to debate the proved staying power of the offspring of this cross, the speed of that, the jumping ability of another. And last week it was decided. The stud was 10 miles away. Would I ride Sally out? Well, would I? November, and foals to see.

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So I rode Sally out, a long way on beautiful motoring roads, a long way at a walk, no signs of soreness, but still at a walk on mile after mile of concrete. But the side road down to the stud farm was soft red earth with smooth margins of grass uncut by drains; a leafy, undulating country district and a perfect road for horses. The Major came to meet me in the car. "It won't hurt her to canter on that," he said. So Sally rocked me into a sleepy wakefulness in the sun as we went quietly along that road; and my mind if full of a hazy mixture of pictures of fat lambs, blossoming apple trees, thick mayflower, daisies, daisies and daisies, hills away off smoky blue below and sunlit above, and then—O! steady, Sally! Brown foals, bay foals, chocolate foals, chestnut foals all leaning close to their large, slow-moving, mild-eyed dams in paddocks of softly-blowing rye; foals stretching and bending giraffe necks to drink from head-nodding mares in the shade of pines and aspen poplars; foals in the sun stealing a daring moment away from their dams to venture a meeting; one foal with sudden and amazing verve kicking at the others,

then back with a rush to that large and protecting mother.

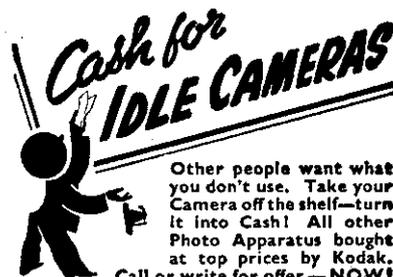
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Sunshine, the first of the season. Some of her first coat was already coming out, showing dark patches under that chestnut furry hair. Sunshine was friendly, looked painstakingly for sugar, made us fond of her from the first moment.

But, next door, this shaky little creature only four days old. Face dished in, forehead bumpy still, well over at the knees and changing weight for balance on those elegant, elongate pasterns and hooves. A honey-coloured and golden filly, four days old and still tremulous and uncertain of human creatures. But at last her muzzle, tightly folded over with whiskers, was in my hands; I touched her face, her bumpy forehead, her furry neck while she breathed at me with a mixture of curiosity and courage. And I wondered, I wonder still, at the extraordinary softness of her.

What would I like for Christmas?

—J.



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