

# Crash Course

**This second-career  
racehorse is using  
his speed in the snow.**

**By Kathy A. Johnson**

IT HAS BEEN CALLED THE "rowdiest ski race in the world" by *Ski* magazine, and it's not a fit for a lot of horses. But skijoring made the perfect next career for Party Crashin after he left an Arizona racetrack for a Montana ranch.



Kristi Herbig first met Party Crashin on the racetrack, and she has since helped him find a niche on the ranch and the skijoring course.





ANDREA KLYKOV

Speed and good-mindedness have served "Crash" well in numerous settings.

Fifteen-year-old "Crash" (Royal Shake Em-Watchin The Rain by Takin On The Cash) belongs to Kristi Herbig of Whitehall, Montana. Kristi and her husband, John, are AQHA life members with backgrounds in breeding, racing and ranching.

Kristi first met Crash when she was working as a pony rider for Matt, Ralph and Carrie Fales at Turf Paradise in Phoenix and Arizona Downs in Prescott. She ponied Crash when he was racing as a 2- and 3-year old, and Kristi always liked him, as did the jockeys and gate crew. Crash had some racing success, making 25 starts and earning more than \$64,000.

Kristi left the track about 10 years ago, and by then, the Faleses were riding Crash and using him as a pony horse.

Kristi wanted to take Crash with her, but "they wouldn't sell him to me because he was Matt's first homebred stakes winner," she says.

So Kristi put Crash out of her mind and settled into her new ranch life in Montana, knowing that Crash was in great hands.

"The Faleses are some of the best people I know for taking care of horses in the racing industry," Kristi says. "Carrie will keep a horse until it dies if it's one of her babies."

## Getting Into Skijoring

ABOUT SIX YEARS AGO, KRISTI BEGAN RIDING IN skijoring races, which call for a rider on horseback to pull a snow skier through a challenging course.

While rules and courses differ, skijoring is a timed race, and skiers must clear jumps, go through gates and spear hanging rings with a baton or grab them by hand. Time penalties are assessed for missed jumps or gates, or for missed or dropped rings. To win, participants must have a clean run with no penalties, the skier must be on at least one ski and holding the rope, and the rider must be on the horse's back when they cross the finish line.

Kristi got into the sport when she was looking for a winter pastime. A neighbor filled her in and connected her with a skier.

"We did really well and made a little money," Kristi says, "and it's a blast!"

Kristi mostly used two horses for skijoring: Mr Speedman, now 22 and also an ex-racer, and a grade Quarter Horse named Bucky. She had success with both horses, and Bucky, especially, seemed to enjoy the sport.

## Trading for Crash

LAST YEAR, AFTER KRISTI HAD POSTED A PHOTO OF Bucky on Facebook, she heard from Carrie Fales.

"Carrie saw the photo and commented that (Bucky) would make a good pony horse for the babies and 2-year-olds at their farm. I kind of made an offhand comment like, 'Well, find me something equivalent, and we'll talk about trading.'"

Bucky, who is around 18 years old, was Kristi's favorite horse for ranch work, as well as skijoring, but he was getting older, and the winters in Montana were getting harder for him.

"I didn't think anything of it. Then a couple of weeks later, she sent me a message, saying, 'Do you remember Party Crashin?' And I said, 'Yeah, I loved that horse.' And she said, 'Do you think he would work?'"

"I said, 'Uh, I'll be there tomorrow!'"

"I was so worried that she was going to change her mind. I went down there and got him within two weeks," Kristi says.

Moving to Montana from Arizona must have been quite a shock for Crash, but he took it all in stride. When Kristi brought him home, it was still 100 degrees in the Casa Grande/Coolidge, Arizona, area where he had come from.

"I got him home and put him in the barn, and then it



snowed about 2 inches the next morning. I have a video of him when he walks out of the barn, and he has got his nose down smelling the snow, like 'What the heck is this stuff?'

"Crash had never been off flat ground. He'd always been a desert horse. He'd never been through the mud bogs and streams we have on the ranches up here, or seen tall grass like we have. But I started riding him and really liked his brain, and after a week, I took him up in the mountains to help some friends gather some bulls. As I got to know him, I just knew I liked this horse. He has got some potential," Kristi says.

Mellow and laid back, he's accepting of anything you do, and Kristi says he's friendly without being an "in your pocket" horse.

"I haven't trained him to run barrels, but I've taken him trail riding," Kristi says. "I've used him for a lot of ranch work, like gathering or sorting cows, even moving sheep around. He's not flighty at all. Bucky was my go-to horse, and now Crash is. He's pretty cowy for a race-bred horse."

### But Could He Do Skijoring?

LAST NOVEMBER, WHEN KRISTI'S PRIMARY SKIJORING SKIER WAS planning a hunting trip near her home, Kristi told him to bring his skis and they'd see how Crash handled pulling a skier.

"Some horses don't care, and some horses don't like the noise of the snow friction behind them. It kind of 'boogers' them a little bit," she says. Crash didn't mind the skier behind him, so Kristi took him to Butte, Montana, in January 2019 for his first skijoring race.

Skijoring is a tough sport to master because so many things have to go just right.

Kristi describes it as a combination of water skiing, downhill skiing and slalom skiing, with jumps to go over, too.

It's like water skiing in that "you have to know when to take hold of your rope to get more speed or to let it go so you're not pulling yourself too hard. The way the skiers crawl up and down this rope can make or break their run," she says.

Crash's racetrack speed can be both a blessing and a curse.

"Most of my skiers this year were doing well, but they'd miss a gate or hit a gate, or miss a jump, and that costs you half a second. Just like with racing, all it takes is a thousandth of a second to blow a race," she says. "Four of the five races we went to, Crash had the fastest time by at least a second, but my skiers can't handle it!"

Despite his speed and the excitement of pulling a skier, Crash's even-keeled nature is evident during skijoring competitions, and he performs responsively in a mild bit.

Kristi is looking forward to this winter's skijoring races. Crash's speed has attracted attention, and Kristi says she has been approached by some of the top skiers who want her to pull them this year.

Looks like this ex-racehorse from the desert has a bright future in the snowy mountains of his new Montana home. 🐾

*Freelance writer Kathy A. Johnson lives in central Florida and owns a 24-year-old Quarter Horse who has never seen snow.*



The homebred Party Crashin made his owners proud in his first career on the track, winning more than \$64,000.