

Good Fences

Three Paints showcased their reined cow horse dominance and captured victories at the Celebration of Champions.

By JESSICA HEIN



Good fences make good neighbors, but they also help generate great scores in reined cow horse competition. In February, three Paints dominated their events and emerged victorious at the National Reined Cow Horse Association's (NRCHA) Fort Dodge Animal Health Celebration of Champions in San Angelo, Texas—thanks, in part, to scores they reaped down the fence.

Cookin Merada, Zezes Pepto Cat and One Smokin Chic—all of whom are American Paint Horse Association (APHA) world champions—topped their classes at the event. Five-year-old Cookin Merada won the Circle Y Ranch Southwest Reined Cow Horse Association (SRCHA) Open Derby, while 6-year-old Zezes Pepto Cat and 8-year-old One Smokin Chic won NRCHA world championships in Open Hackamore and Open Bridle, respectively.

"It's neat that a Paint Horse won the Derby and Paint Horses won the Open Hackamore and the Open Bridle [events]," said Bozo Rogers of Lipan, Texas, who rode One Smokin Chic. "It's pretty unusual. When you go out there, it's the best horses there are. [Officials] don't care what breeding they are [in NRCHA events], so they really have to do it on their own merit."



Cookin Merada won the Circle Y Ranch SRCHA Open Derby.



Zezes Pepto Cat took home the NRCHA Open Hackamore world championship.



One Smokin Chic earned a NRCHA world champion title in Open Bridle.

Turning up the heat

NRCHA Million Dollar Rider Todd Crawford of Blanchard, Oklahoma, has trained Cookin Merada since the 2004 sorrel overo stallion was a 2-year-old. By December 2008, Crawford made plans to enter "Spot" in the NRCHA Circle Y Ranch SRCHA Open Derby in February. Completing most of the stallion's show preparation at his outdoor facility—thanks to a mostly mild Oklahoma winter—Crawford chose to make final preparations for Spot and his other horses in Texas. The decision proved wise.

"Carol Rose rented the Lone Star Arena down in Stephenville (Texas)," said Crawford, "and we went down there and practiced for a week. It was fortunate for me because that's when an ice storm hit there in Oklahoma."

Crawford and Spot's owners—Kenneth and Regina Kuethe of Midland, Texas, who own the stallion under the name Metacorp LTD—say their goals are to win every event Spot enters, and the Open Derby was no exception.

"Every time Cookin Merada is shown, we expect him to win," said Kenneth. "I guess that is a bold statement—we have that much confidence in the team of Todd Crawford and Cookin Merada. I know Todd works hard and gives the team a chance to win every time they enter the show ring."

Facing a field of 70 horses, Spot and Crawford were scheduled to perform toward the end of the one-round event, giving Crawford time to watch some of his competitors and monitor their scores. When it came time to enter the arena, the team did not disappoint.

Todd Crawford rode Cookin Merada to a 442 composite score to win the Derby and more than \$12,000.



"He was really, really good in the reining," said Crawford. "He had a little bobble through a lead change and cost me a point penalty, but he still marked a 149.5 with that penalty."

"Going down the fence, I pretty much knew that I had to be real big to have a chance at winning, and I probably took a couple of chances. I went down the fence a little earlier than I might have if I'd drawn up earlier in the contest. I just tried to present him with a little higher degree of difficulty. I

marked a 149.5, and I needed every bit of that to win."

Yielding a composite score of 442 to top the event—they marked a 143 for herd work and a pair of 149.5 scores in the reined work and cow work—Crawford says the cow they drew was a big part of their success.

"This cow was difficult and presented a big challenge for him," Crawford said, "but at the same time, it let [Spot] work him. He's gotten pretty smart about going down the fence and maybe knows a little more about what to expect with the experience of a 4-year-old year of showing."

Sired by Meradas Money Talks AQHA, Spot has cow sense in his blood. An earner of nearly \$48,000, Meradas Money Talks was a National Cutting Horse Association Super Stakes and Open Derby finalist. His get have earned nearly \$2 million—to date, Spot has earned more than \$95,500.

Crawford says it takes talent in all three phases—reined work, herd work and fence work—to place well in cow horse events.

"Cow horse derbies are a combination of all three, and you've got to be pretty well ready to be very good at all three," he said. "[Spot] is a real easy horse to prepare and train, and he's fun. Hopefully, he's ready to rock and roll this year."

One (hacka)more win

Having shown Zezes Pepto Cat since 2006, trainer Tom Neel of Millsap, Texas, knew he had a great horse and a strong shot at winning the NRCHA Open Hackamore world championship.

With more than \$95,000 in lifetime earnings, Cookin Merada is an APHA world champion and World Show reserve champion in working cow horse events.

Cookin Merada

2004 sorrel overo stallion
(Meradas Money Talks AQHA x
Cookies Cookin AQHA)

Equi-Stat lifetime earnings:
\$95,555.16

2009: Champion, Circle Y Ranch
SRCHA Open Derby

2008: World champion, APHA Junior
Working Cow Horse

2008: Reserve champion,
APHA 4- and 5-Year-Old
Working Cow Horse
Challenge

2008: Sold for \$100,000 at public
auction

2007: Third, NRCHA Snaffle Bit
Futurity



An easy-going personality has helped Zezes Pepto Cat excel in APHA and NRCHA events.

“He’s always been a really good horse,” said Neel. “He’s got a lot of talent and a lot of desire to dominate cattle, and he’s a big stopper. He can be good out in the herd, in the reining and down the fence.”

At the Celebration of Champions event, Neel and “Junior” faced a field of 24 in the preliminaries—and only the top 10 would make it to the finals. They would need a solid score in both the reined and fence work.

“In the preliminaries, I just wanted to have a really solid run,” Neel said. “We marked a pair of 217.5s in the reining and on the fence. The cow on the fence was actually a bit nasty—it was more of survival. But I marked a 435 [composite score] and I kind of thought, ‘I’m in there easy.’”

“The hackamore class this year ended up being a very, very tough class. I was in the middle of the first set, and there were three

Zeze Pepto Cat

2003 sorrel overo stallion
(Zeze Gunsmoke x Boons Cat)

Equi-Stat lifetime earnings:
\$73,726.17

- 2009: World champion, NRCHA Open Hackamore
- 2008: Champion, APHA 4- and 5-Year-Old Working Cow Horse Challenge
- 2008: Champion, APHA Fall Show Working Cow Horse Sweepstakes
- 2008: Champion, Sagebrush Slide Open Derby
- 2008: Reserve champion, SRCHA Open Hackamore Year-End Standings
- 2007: Champion, Sagebrush Slide Open Derby
- 2007: Champion, SRCHA Derby Horse
- 2007: Champion, SRCHA Year-End Open Derby
- 2007: World champion, APHA Junior Working Cow Horse
- 2007: Top 10, APHA World Show Junior Reining

sets—by the second set I had to sit there and root for the cows!” Neel joked. “The cattle were good and the pen was awesome, so it just led to being able to get horses shown.”

Neel and the 2003 sorrel overo stallion came back to the finals tied for eighth place. A solid reining pattern, combined with excellent fence work on their second cow, helped propel the team into the lead with a composite score of 442.5 in the finals.

“I got two cows,” said Neel. “The first cow came out and was really tough. The second cow that came in was a really nice cow. It came in and allowed [Junior] to play with him in the boxing.”

Showing in a very large pen, Neel says he knew his horse’s first trip down the fence had to be long—a point-earning strategy that could end in penalties if executed incorrectly.

“I wasn’t sure I was going to get that cow turned before the corner,” he said. “It actually turned into my horse and kind of banged



Primo

PRIMO MORALES



JESSICA HEIN

into him, but we made a big-time turn. We had another good turn and made another turn off of the fence and then kept a hold of it and circled, and he circled good. We marked a 225.

“The cattle were a little bit on the tough side, which can be good when it works and not so good when it doesn’t.”

Neel says the cow work is Junior’s strength and key to his victory.

“He can run and stop hard and turn quick, and always keeps a hold of that cow so he always has control of it,” the trainer said. “He really enjoys when the cow kind of challenges him. He likes to rise to the occasion. I knew he pretty much had the cow dominated, and was pretty confident they were going to mark us really well.”

Junior comes from a long line of successful performers. His sire, Zeze Gunsmoke, is a two-time APHA working cow horse world champion and has lifetime earnings of more

than \$12,000. Zeze Gunsmoke is a son of multiple APHA world and national champion Docs Gunsmoke, who in turn is a son of the legendary Mr Gun Smoke AQHA. To date, Junior has earned more than \$73,700.

Competing in hackamore events is challenging, says Neel.

“Our joke is that you usually have about two less runs in the hackamore than you think you’ve got,” he said. “So the fact that he was really good in the hackamore really impressed some people that have quite a bit of knowledge on hackamore horses. But he’s always been really good in it—he’s a really consistent horse.”

Capturing the world championship in the Open Hackamore division was a fitting finale for Junior. Neel says he plans to compete the stallion in Open Two Rein events this year before moving him into the Open Bridle division.

Strong cow work was key to Zezes Pepto Cat’s victory. The stallion and rider Tom Neel marked a 442.5 to win the Open Hackamore world championship.

One Smokin Chic and Bozo Rogers led the field in both the preliminaries and finals of the Open Bridle event, and clinched the world championship with a 440.5 score.



Smokin' hot

A three-time APHA world championship titleholder, One Smokin Chic consistently performs at the top of both APHA and NRCHA competition. She's steadily progressed through the ranks—showing in hackamore, two-rein and bridle events—and has earned more than \$43,300. On the final days of the 2009 Celebration of Champions, “Wheezy” put

another feather in her cap when she won the NRCHA Open Bridle world championship out of an 18-horse field.

“I was pretty sure I could make the finals and top 10 on her,” said the 2001 sorrel tobiano mare's exhibitor and trainer, Bozo Rogers. “There were several horses in there that I knew would be pretty tough to get around—it was going to be whoever drew the best cattle and had the best luck at that show. In the Open Bridle, there's always a lot of good horses.”

In the first go-round, Rogers says he simply wanted to mark a clean run with the mare. However, a difficult cattle draw forced Rogers to rethink his plan.

“The cattle were tough, and we couldn't be real cautious,” he said. “You had to go for it and hope you had enough horse for the finals.”

The duo scored well, earning a 224 down the fence toward a composite score of 439, 3.5 points higher than their closest competi-

One Smokin Chic

2001 sorrel tobiano mare
(Freckle Face Smoke x Ms Peppy Olena)

Equi-Stat lifetime earnings:
\$43,300.27

2009: World champion, NRCHA
Open Bridle

2008: NRCHA Supreme Reined Cow
Horse Award

2008: Champion, SRCHA Open
Bridle Year-End Standings

2008: Reserve world champion,
APHA Senior Working Cow
Horse

2006: World champion, APHA Junior
Working Cow Horse

2005: World champion, APHA Junior
Working Cow Horse



A multiple world champion, One Smokin Chic was recently honored with the NRCHA's Supreme Reined Cow Horse Award.

tor. Going into the finals as the event leader was hard, says Rogers.

“When you know you've got the one that can really go win it, it will make your nerves a little bit on edge,” he said.

Putting nerves aside, Rogers and Wheezy kept up their winning form and topped the finals field with a 440.5 composite score.

“She's always been a nervous little mare, so you really have to make sure that you have her attention and that she's focused,” Rogers said. “When I got to the center and stopped [before the reining pattern] and she was pretty quiet, I knew she was ready. She was a 217.5 in the finals, which was up 2.5 points from her go-round run.”

As in the other events, the Open Bridle division cattle were challenging, said Rogers.

“The finals cow was even tougher than the go-round cow,” he said. “I didn't get to hold him very long on the end. We just kind of gambled and went with it. We had a long run there on the rundown and a real good turn on the cow. The second turn was another good turn, and we went to the center after two turns and circled up right in the center of the pen.”

“They gave us quite a bit of credit for being pretty much on form, as far as getting the long run in each direction, coming to the center and getting circled right in the center of the pen. There wasn't anything I could do

different—she was just as honest as she could be and really handled a tough, tough cow.”

Sired by NRCHA champion Freckle Face Smoke, Wheezy is a petite but determined competitor, says Rogers.

“She's probably the best fence horse I've ever ridden—she just runs and buries her butt so hard and is so quick up off the ground to go back the other way,” Rogers said. “It's phenomenal that she can run that hard and handle cattle that tough. It's just real unusual that a little mare could be that tough.”

Although winning a world championship was an exciting feat to accomplish, it wasn't Wheezy's only shining moment. Recently, the mare was awarded the NRCHA Supreme Reined Cow Horse award, an elite title given to the top reined cow horses. Following a short vacation—during which Wheezy will be bred via embryo transfer—she'll be back in the show pen to capture even more jewels for her crown. **PHJ**

