

A first-in-a-lifetime experience

Exhibiting at the 2009 APHA Fall World Championship Show was a first-in-a-lifetime experience for me. I have been an equestrian for over thirty years. In fact, I run an equine appraisal firm. Everything about me is “horsey.” But it wasn’t until January of 2008 that I met the horse that would help me to achieve success in Paint Horse competition at the World Show level.

I own a 2005 APHA gelding, Gotta Be A Hotrod, but everyone calls him “Eddie.” With my purchase of Eddie, I set my sights on competing at the World Show. While his mostly sorrel color isn’t as bold and flashy as some Paint Horses, his movement and disposition are the stuff of every horse-crazy girl’s dreams.

Most equestrians can relate to the excitement that builds before a major competition. I had butterflies for a week before I left! I have been to Fort Worth several times, including competing with my Miniature Horses at AMHA Nationals. But, I was sure a trip to Fort Worth with a “big” horse was going to be more thrilling! The Will Rogers Complex features many barns, arenas, and amenities like good shopping and nice hotels that make going to a horse show pleasurable. Combine the great facility with the friendly American Paint Horse Association staff, world-class horses and exhibitors, and the anticipation was almost too much for me to handle.



Working with my trainer, we planned a 2009 show and rest schedule that would allow my horse and me to peak at just the right time, November 5-14th. Eddie and I competed in APHA shows from California to Oklahoma to prepare ourselves for the long trip and stressful conditions of the two week long World Show. In August, we participated in The Reichert Celebration in Tulsa, OK, where Eddie was High Point APHA Horse with Halter and we earned the Reserve High Point Amateur All-Around. He was also Top Five in Green Trail and Top Ten in Green Hunter Under Saddle at the NSBA World Show the following week. Our last show before leaving for Fort Worth was the Western Paint World Show in Bakersfield, CA. Eddie was Reserve High Point Jr. Horse at that show and I felt confident our trip to Fort Worth would be fulfilling.

Planning ahead, I wanted to arrive at the show a few days early to get acclimated, adjust to the time change, and relax, something I often forget to do at shows. I am told it is supposed to be fun to horse show, but all the money, time, and energy invested to get to that point usually causes me more stress than mirth. Because of my work, I could not take the extra time to drive to Texas. My trainer hauled Eddie and the other horses from our barn, which is a three day drive from Fort Worth. I flew in on Tuesday, and my first class was not until Thursday. So far, the plan was working.

The Will Rogers Complex was a swarm of activity. Security Officers checked my car and made sure I was an exhibitor before putting a sticker on my windshield indicating I was allowed to enter the facility. Parking was a challenge. The Fort Worth police were out in full force to protect and serve the equestrians, but they were also happily writing parking tickets, even for vehicles being unloaded. I appreciated the security but unloading a 6 horse trailer and all the accessories our equine companions require for a two week visit is time consuming and tiresome. From big rig behemoths to small SUVs pulling 2 horse stock trailers, there were rigs everywhere the first few days. Judging from the number of vehicles and people unloading, the show seemed big, and I immediately began to worry.

Are we really ready for this? Did we do all we could to prepare? What if the other horses are fancier than mine? I wasn’t there for an hour yet and I already had self-doubts. Fortunately, it didn’t take long for my support group to form. I made new friends, saw plenty of folks I already knew, and even got to meet some on-line friends in person (thanks to the Pleasure Horse Journal Forum and Facebook). I purchased a Horsemanship top and the seller was going to deliver it to me at the show. It was great to meet another

horse-crazy person and talk about the insanity of horse showing. That really helped to put things in perspective.

I walked around the barns to burn off some nervous energy. To walk down the aisles and peer into the stalls of famous horses that I mostly knew of from articles and ads in magazines was spectacular. Like the variety of towing set ups, I saw varied stall set ups. Some aisles looked like construction zones, with lumber, tools, and busy workers hurrying to assemble temporary showcases for some of the finest horses in our breed. The final products ranged from elaborate scenes out of the Wild West to a fully stocked bar, and others went low-key, leaving the stall fronts plain with no curtains or decorations other than the accessories of a working stable. I saw ingenious ways to store saddles, longe whips, polo wraps, folding saddle racks, and show clothing. It was obvious from my walk through the barns during the two week show that this is an international event. Miss Ali Tramp, a Mexican-bred Paint Horse, won the World Champion in Open Tobiano Weanling Mares and Reserve World Champion in Breeders' Futurity Platinum Tobiano Weanling Mares.



Many of the barns travel with dogs, too. And, in case you were one of the few without a canine companion, APHA even set up a puppy alley so you could buy a pet to ease your loneliness. There was a lemur in the puppy alley, but he wasn't for sale. Nor were the two adorable, chattering monkeys across the aisle from us. If you want to start a heated debate at a Paint Horse show, you have to go way past the typical taboo topics of politics or religion. Ask someone what they think of those monkeys and you are likely to get an earful. I really enjoyed them, and took several photos as keepsakes. But there were others who felt strongly that the event is called a "horse show" for a reason.

While APHA has been hosting a World Show in July for many years, the number of competitors and variety of classes offered outgrew the time available in the summer. Last year, APHA moved the Open classes for Junior horses (five years of age and under) as well as Senior horses to the inaugural Fall Championship Show. This year marked the first time that Novice Amateur and Amateur events were moved to November. The show began on Thursday, with Novice and Amateur events. The following week, Wednesday, the Open competition began.

At the state and regional level shows, some horses really stand out as exemplary. Watching the show, I realized that most of the horses were exemplary and only a small few were "just average." I was impressed by the professionalism of the judges. Their placings were thoughtful, including many similarities, and they thoroughly reviewed individual performances in classes like Western Riding and Trail. I watched many classes, from Jumping, to Longe Line, Halter and Pleasure Driving. Seeing so many events reminded me just how versatile Paint Horses are. There was something for everyone, including a patriotic Veterans Day showcase of Paint Horses assisting challenged riders and veterans, demonstrations by Lynn Palm and Clint Haverty, an Amateur Reception party, and wildly popular dog races.

As if all that wasn't enough, the most entertaining thing I saw in the arena was the tractor guy. Nicknamed "Fast Eddie" by his slightly less enthusiastic ring crew counterparts, that guy was a speedy genius on the big blue tractor. The slightly manic way he weaved in and around the jump course between rounds showed that he took his job of providing good footing very seriously. And, when one of the horses refused a jump and lost his tail extension in the process, "Fast Eddie" barreled through the arena, grabbed the tail, put it under his own cowboy hat and "galloped" back out in a flash. A total hoot for which I cheered loudly!



The show itself is a blur to me. I only had one class each day, but the show still whirled by me quickly. The routine was similar to the other shows I attended this season: rise before dawn, get my horse out for a little

fun on the longe line, groom and tack up, participate in a way-too-early paid warm up class, do my show prep and then wait...for my class, that is. My horse surprised me by making it to the Finals of our Western Pleasure Class and I surprised myself by earning a Top Ten placing in Trail.

I am glad I had the forethought to order custom videos of my classes before I got to the show, because I was overwhelmed with things to do during the competition and never found time to make sure they could execute my order before my first few classes. Fortunately, the videographers are true professionals and much more organized than I was. For a first time competitor, I ordered videos and lots of photos. I was like a kid in a candy store with these personal keep-sakes, though I managed to overcome the temptation to shop for clothing or other equestrian doo-dads in the well stocked vendor area. I can buy new boots anywhere, but I could only get a Top Ten photo against the Fall World Championship Show backdrop there. As a recent APHA Fall World Show veteran, I am already looking forward to 2010!

