

Hi folks, I thought I'd wind up 2009 with a little Cinderella story about a mare named Cals Cindy Ann. In 1972, Cindy Ann was the first Cal Bar foal ever to win on a national level, and here's her story...

Cindy Ann was a very pretty little bay mare, however she was wilder than a March hare. Very energetic and a little high strung, when she got in front of a cow she'd be down on her belly patting her front feet like crazy. When the cow left, she'd blast out with it like a rocket ship! Her personality made her quite a challenge to train, she was difficult to establish a sense of trust and confidence with, which is crucial in a good Futurity horse. But I loved her anyway, she was really cool.

My great friend, Ed Smith from Escalon, California owned her as well as another great futurity prospect by the name of Docs Nymphish. He was a beautiful sorrel gelding with a big, hard stop and a very agile front end. He was extremely cow smart, always willing and eager to please. He was everything you could ask for in a good cutting horse and I was very excited about showing him in the Ft. Worth Futurity that year.

One morning, Ed came to me and said he'd really like to try to win the Nonpro division that year in the Futurity and thought he might not get another chance like this again since this horse was so extraordinary. Back in those days, we were only allowed one horse, so that meant if he rode the gelding, I couldn't, which left me Cindy Ann. Ed was very kind about it, not demanding in any way and even though it was a big disappointment to me, I could see how much it meant to him. So I decided to hang my hat on Cindy Ann that year and take my chances. I told him "Sure Ed, let's give it everything we've got!"

November 28th 1972, Ed and I took off for the Futurity practice in Sweetwater, Texas. It was being hosted by Buster Welch and Shorty Freeman that year and was by invitation only, quite a big deal, we were very excited and really looking forward to it on the whole drive out there.

On the first day of the practice everything went great. Ed and that gelding were the talk of the arena, everyone was abuzz. Buster and Shorty were very impressed with their performance and told Ed he could easily sell his horse for a

lot of money, but Ed just laughed them off and said he could just as easily keep him forever. Needless to say, he was a very happy man.

The second day of the practice went a little differently. Cindy Ann was getting wild and reckless on me, and I was more than a little concerned about it. We were the talk of the arena that day, though unfortunately not in the same light as Ed had been. I had some of my peers suggest that I'd be much better off showing the gelding than that little "mattress thrasher", and that my chances of keeping her in the arena for four go rounds were pretty slim. Later that day, Shorty came over to me and said, "Looks to me like things were getting pretty western out there on your mare today, Leon." I told him they were and I didn't know what to do about it. He said that she had plenty of training, that wasn't her problem; we just needed to figure out how to slow her emotions down so she could stay calm and focus on her job better. He suggested a vitamin B supplement might be just the ticket, so I followed his advice and it worked like a charm on her. She got better and better every day after that practice. Her confidence grew in leaps and bounds, as did mine.

When we arrived in Ft. Worth for the Futurity, we were in for an unpleasant surprise. One of the worst ice storms in history was in full swing and it was impossible to leave the show grounds. In those days we didn't have practice pens at the show to work our horses in like we do now. You had to trailer to nearby ranches to get your horses worked on live cattle. It was not an ideal situation for any of us showing there that year.

Cindy Ann, however, was just getting more and more confident each day I rode her, and I was becoming quite proud of her performance. On Finals day, only a few competitors had the nerve to attempt to leave the grounds to work their horses, the roads were terrible and very dangerous. I on the other hand, had a plan of my own, and early that afternoon I took Cindy Ann into the main arena, closed the back fence gate (where the cattle came in during the show) and turned her loose. I then crawled up into the judges stand and took a nap while she ran and played and acquainted herself with things. When I woke up, she had played herself out and was standing under the judges stand waiting for me. I took her

back to the barn, bathed her, fed her and put her up while I went back to the Green Oaks Motel (which was where we all stayed back then). I cleaned up, rested and prepared for the finals that evening. As it turned out, Cals Cindy Ann won the Reserve Open Championship that year! My little “mattress thrasher” was brilliant for me, and Buster, who remembered that fateful practice day at his ranch months earlier, was the first one to come over and congratulate me on what a great little cow horse I had made of her. It meant an awful lot to me coming from him back then when I was still relatively new at the game.

Since then, the NCHA has created a wonderful show program that allows all competitors to be safe and keep their horses in tune right up until they enter the show pen. The advent of the practice pens has been paramount to the outstanding performances at each and every event they host nowadays.

Many thanks to Steve and Vicki Long and Horseback magazine. It has been a pleasure sharing my stories with you this past year. My wonderful wife Alex and I would like to wish you all a fantastic, safe holiday season and a prosperous and healthy New Year!

Until next time...