

All About Horse Judging

AN INTERVIEW WITH JODY ZEIER

BY ALLISON SCHULTZ

Since my involvement with BCHA, I've heard an abundance of things about the accomplishments of Jody Zeier, and set out to interview her and get the full scoop on the woman who has become synonymous with horse judging success. First, let me give you a preview of her dossier: She's been an active organizational leader of the Easy Riders 4-H club since 1972 when her children began their horse projects; she has served as president of the Boulder County 4-H horse leaders council and is still active on that council; she has served on the Colorado State Horse Advisory Council for the past 15 years and currently serves as their elected treasurer; she is the chair of the sub-committee on the current revision of the state 4-H rulebook, which is bound for print this fall; she was awarded the "Volunteer Horse Judging Coach of the Year" by the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association in 2003; and she is also on numerous national committees within the Arabian Horse Association. In her spare time, she coaches the Colorado Arabian Horse Club's Youth Judging Team and also coaches the Boulder County 4-H Horse Judging Team. Overall, she makes Martha Stewart look like an underachiever.

How long have you been involved with horses?

I started taking riding lessons as an elementary age student at a hunter jumper barn in Columbia, Oregon. After moving to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 8th grade, I worked baby sitting, gardening, cleaning and whatever jobs I could find at home and at neighbors to earn and save enough money to pay for my first horse - for \$85.00. I had to continue to work to pay his board and other expenses. I believe my parents thought if I had to work hard enough, I would give it up! When I came to CU for college, I brought my horse. I worked by ironing for the other girls in the dorm and sorority house to pay his bills. During those years at CU, I was on the CU rodeo team, running barrels and goat tying. After graduation, I took my horse with me to a teaching job in Scottsdale, Arizona.

What does being on a horse judging team involve?

We begin our new year of horse judging the first week of January each year. We meet weekly for 2 to 2 ½ hours until the state conference judging competition in late June. We study basic conformation, travel, structure and the ideal characteristics of every breed: Quarter Horse, Paint, Appaloosa, Arabian, Morgan, Thoroughbreds,



JODY & JESSICA

Jodi Zeier, Boulder County 4-H Judging Coach and Jessica Mullin, High Individual of the 2008 State Championship 4-H Horse Judging Contest.

Andalusians, Tennessee Walking Horses, Hafflingers, Minatures, Mules, Draft horses, etc. We also study all of the competition areas: Western Pleasure, Hunter Under Saddle, Western Riding, Reining, Driving, Western Horsemanship, Hunter Seat Equitation, Hunter Hack, etc. Horse judging competitions can and do have classes from all of these various areas. It usually takes 2-3 years of training for a young member to become competitive at horse judging contests. The members of this year's state champion team have been judging with me for 4 to 7 years.

Team members compete at all of the horse judging competitions given by different counties in Colorado. El Paso County, Douglas County, Logan County, and Elbert County usually hold judging competitions each year. Occasionally Weld, Larimer and/or Adams counties will also hold horse judging competitions. Judging at county competitions helps to prepare team members for the state judging contest which is held in June in Ft. Collins at the Colorado State 4-H conference.

Depending on the placings at the state judging contest, winning teams are then eligible to compete at various national judging contests held later in the year.

How did you get involved in Horse judging?

I became interested in horse judging when my older children, now adults, began to judge during the time they were Boulder County 4-H horse project members. There was no coach for the Boulder County members, so they participated in judging through the youth judging program of the Colorado Arabian Horse Club. In driving to and from the practices and in attending contests with them, I became interested in the skills involved in becoming a successful horse judging team member. However, I did not begin coaching until my children were no longer competing team members.

Due to the time requirements involved in coaching a horse judging team, I did not begin coaching until after I retired in 1994 from 32 years as an elementary school teacher (27 of those years in the Boulder Valley School District). I started a Boulder County 4-H Horse Judging team in 1994, which was my youngest daughters last year in 4-H. I have continued coaching Boulder County 4-H judging teams and the Colorado Arabian Horse Club's youth judging teams since then.

Have you been involved in Judging outside of the 4-H arena?

I held a judging card, through the United States Equestrian Federation in both Western and Western Seat Equitation, until physical limitations restricted my ability to stand in the center ring for 12-14 hours a day and made judging impossible. I am, and have been for the last 25 years, a licensed United States Equestrian Federation steward for Hunter, Jumper, Arabian, Morgan and various breeds shows approved by USEF both locally (within Colorado) and nationally. Coaching a judging team was a way to stay active and involved in the horse world, in all breeds and venues, and to use my teaching skills to help young people learn valuable skills.

What is involved in a horse judging contest?

There are usually 4-6 classes of halter horses to be judged. Classes are composed of 4 horses, which may be of any breed or gender (except for national breed competitions, when the halter and performance horses are breed specific). The horses are judged on their balance, structure, muscling, breed type and/or sex characteristics. The placing of those 4 horses is compared to the placings of an official panel of judges and the competitor's placing is scored according to the deviation of the plac-



JUNIOR TEAM

Colorado 4-H Reserve Champion Junior Team: Piper Zeier (High individual), Madison Zeier, Madison McKenzie

ing from the "official" placing of the panel. There are also 4-6 performance classes judged, which come from a lengthy list of classes.

Competitors usually do not know what halter and performance classes they will be judging until the morning of the contest (with the exception that national contests usually announce the classes to be judged at a coaches meeting the night before the contest). Each class will have 4 horses. The performance classes are placed and compared to the "official" placings and scored accordingly. The judging usually takes all morning.

After lunch, juniors (13 and under) give 2 or 3 sets of "reasons" and seniors (14-18) give 4 sets of "reasons." Reasons are a detailed explanation given by each of the contestants to a judge who scores those reasons based on accuracy, organization, delivery, use of proper descriptive terms, etc. Reasons are limited to 2 minutes in length. Halter, performance, and reasons scores are added together to give an overall score for that individual. During the contest, there is no talking and no contact of the competitors with their coach, any other adult, any team member or other competitor is allowed. Awards are usually given after reasons are completed and the scores have been tabulated. However, at a national contest, results are announced at an awards breakfast the next morning.

What kinds of awards have your teams won?

Our Colorado Arabian Horse Club youth teams have been named National Champions at the Arabian National Judging Contests in 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002,

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2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. We have had the high individuals of that contest five of those years. Those teams have also won the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show judging contests 4 of the 5 years it has been held -- with the high individual of the contest 4 times.

Various past Boulder County 4-H Horse Judging Teams have won the Colorado State Conference Contest title four times since 1997 and been the reserve champion of the contest four other years. (Note: After winning the state 4-H contest and competing at the 4-H National Contest, none of those team members are allowed to compete on a 4-H team again). We have been in the top 5 of the American Quarter Horse Congress competition twice, the reserve champion team at the Paint World contest, and three times reserve champion team at the Quarter Horse Youth World contest, having the high individual in 2006. We have represented Colorado 4-H at the National 4-H contest (teams have to have won their state contest in order to enter the contest and represent their state) on three occasions and were named reserve champion once and National Champion Team twice. We will be representing Colorado at the next 4-H National competition to be held in January 2009, at the National Western 4-H Roundup, held during the National Western Stock Show.

To what do you credit your teams' many successes over the years?

Hard work and involved participation by team members. Also, parents must be encouraging, supportive and cooperative and bring their youth to scheduled practices and competitions.

How does horse judging contribute to the future success of involved youth participants?

Again, the "hard work begets success" ethic comes into play. Some of the skills developed are the ability to speak publicly, the ability to organize and verbally give reasons for decisions made. These skills are vastly improved by the requirement to give "reasons" at judging contests.

Judging team members become more poised, more self confident and much more able to verbally defend their thoughts and/or decisions. They become excellent public



SENIOR TEAM A

3rd place Team at the State 4-H Judging Contest: Samantha Wilcox, Meghan Rickel, Katie Richardson



SENIOR TEAM B

Colorado 4-H State Champion Senior Team: Jessica Mullin, Nederland – Christa Forsberg, Longmont – Olivia Fetter, Brighton-Jordan Owen, Arvada

speakers and are able to successfully deal with interviews, inquiries as to grades or job requirements in the "real world." They learn the responsibility of being a cooperative and contributing team member. They also learn how to plan ahead in their packing and travel to and from national contests. All of these skills will help them to be successful in college and future employment.

There are also opportunities for judging individuals to represent their college on collegiate horse judging teams. Often, there are scholarships given to high teams and/or high individuals at national judging contests, which may be used at the college of their choice. Some universities

and colleges give horse judging scholarships for tuition, books, room and board to outstanding horse judging competitors who have been successful at the pre-college level. One of my judging team members paid for her entire bachelor degree (in business) tuition charges with judging scholarship monies, achieved while judging as a youth, at a university which did not award collegiate judging scholarships or support.

*What changes have you noticed in the horse industry over the years?
What changes have you noticed in 4-H?*

It is becoming more difficult for the "average" family to participate in horse activities as the cost of owning, maintaining and showing a horse becomes more expensive, especially in urban areas. The costs of rural properties have become out of reach for most middle income families in Boulder County. The restrictions placed by Boulder County on building barns, indoor arenas, etc., has also made horse keeping more difficult. As Boulder County has become more populated and more restrictive in its policies, it has become increasingly difficult for families to participate in horse activities. The participation in the 4-H horse project in Boulder County is down by 40% since the 1980's. There are still as many children who love horses, but many families cannot participate due to economic considerations. Horse judging is an area interested youth can participate in without owning a horse.

How do you feel about the state of the horse in Boulder County, or how has Boulder County changed in the context of all things horse?

I feel the management of Boulder County open space, the building requirements, trails management, etc., are all unfriendly to horses.

What do you envision the future will bring for horses/horse people in Boulder County, or in general?

I'm concerned that, in the future, only the affluent will be able to participate in all aspects of horse competition, particularly at the regional and national levels. Presently, the only horse shows that are maintaining their previous levels of entries are the upper level hunter/jumper competitions and the national breed competitions. Locally, the numbers of participants in various 4-H and breed shows are down from previous years, which will eventually mean that many show managements will not be able to continue offering shows for their horse clubs, breeds, etc.

What is the schedule for the Boulder County Team for the remainder of this competition year?

This year's Boulder County 4-H Horse Judging Team, which won the Colorado state 4-H judging competition, will travel to Oklahoma City in August to compete at the American Quarter Horse Youth Horse Judging Contest. We will also travel to Columbus, Ohio, in August to compete at the American Quarter Horse Congress Youth Horse Judging Contest. We will compete as an Arabian Youth judging team at the Arabian National Contest in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in late October. Our last opportunity to represent Boulder County 4-H and the State of Colorado will be at the 4-H Western National judging contest to be held at the National Western Stock Show in January of 2009.

Any big lessons or pearls of wisdom you'd like to share?

It seems to me to be important that youth develop the concept that hard and consistent work can and will enable them accomplish their goals. Conversely, lack of effort and motivation are not successful. There is great personal pride for both youth and adults in developing their skills and being a contributing team member that is established best through competition and letting the "chips fall where they may." Success is a road that requires effort!



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970-339-5734
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2930 Pearl Street Boulder, Colorado 80301
303.444.1123 telephone 303.444.1139 fax