

The sticky air clung to your skin while the sun started to set over the grandstands. The smell of fair food and sounds of screeching rides set the tone for an event that keeps bringing crowds back, year after year. Rich Bradshaw has been putting on events at the Geauga County Fair for 28 years, and this year was just as entertaining. Families drew around the fencing that surrounded the horse arenas, hoping to get the best view of this year's Ranch Sorting Championships and Horse & Rider Obstacle Challenge.

Friday night was the 2015 Ranch Sorting Championship event. This event not only has the largest prize money up for grabs, but it is also the oldest cattle event held at any fair in the state of Ohio. Teams of two had to enter a pen of numbered cattle and take turns sorting through and herding specific cows by number, through a small opening in the pen. This opening, referred to as "the gate", would be guarded by one of the team members. Each team had to take turns switching from guarding the gate to sorting the cows, all while trying to beat the clock. The cows set the bar high with a few young cows who proved to be sneaky and quick at sneaking past the person in the gate. The crowd watched each team while either holding their breath or cheering them on as they tried to take home the championship.

Rich's daughter, Pam Bradshaw, has been competing in this event for twenty eight years. This year she made her Father proud when she won the Open Three-Man Sorting, with her two children, Jessie and Cody. Brother-Sister team Kristine May (15) and Casey May (17), were among many competing for cash Friday night. Kristine and Casey recently obtained the titles of AQHYA Youth World Champions in Team Penning, at the 2015 Built Ford Tough AQHYA World Championship Show in August. They have competed all over the U.S. and in at least three other countries. Kristine kicked off this year's Ranch Sorting Championships event, leading the contenders with the American Flag in the opening ceremony. They ended up finishing the night at the top of the Open Sorting. Casey and his Dad, John May, finished in 1st place, with Kristine and Jeff McNish taking 2nd place. Jeff McNish, a longtime friend of Rich, has been attending these events for all 28 years!

These top contenders weren't the only stars of the show this year. Peyton Baar, age 6, had the crowd going wild for her. Riding her small pony who was eye to eye with the cattle she had to sort, Peyton showed no fear making her way through the herd. This was her first time competing at the Geauga County Fair. She started sorting cattle two weeks prior, with the help of Rich Bradshaw showing her the ropes. Peyton is one to watch for in the future!

Sunday night was one of the most exciting event's Rich puts on, the Horse and Rider Obstacle Challenge. This year, there were obstacles many had to ask themselves, "Where did they come up with that?". Rich created a course that certainly challenged the partnership these rider's had with their horses. Not only did the horses have to trust their rider's, but the rider's had to ask their horses to maneuver through some obstacles with fearless precision. The course began with rider's having to choose between two "wildcard" horses tied in the ring. One of the horses was worth points and one was not. Only the judge knew which horse came with the bonus points. The competitors had to ride the horses with no saddle before making a run

back to their own steed to continue onto the obstacles. A large inflatable ball was locked into a steel pen. Rider's had to ride up and open a gate, go in and have their horses move the ball with their feet through the gate and across the arena. Next, they showed off their jumping skills by clearing three fences made of barrels. Some horses showed natural skills and others had the crowd laughing at their efforts. The course continued with a wooden bridge that balanced on a large beam. The horses had to walk onto the bridge while it teeter-tottered, maintain their composure and lower themselves down on the other side. Following this were some narrow planks and boxes they had to walk across before coming to "The Spider Web". This obstacle looked just as scary as it sounds. Numerous large buckets hung from a tall beam with pool noodles jetting out in every direction. Some horses tried to jump through as quickly as someone would if you walked into a spider web yourself! The obstacle course continued on with a tight squeeze that required horses to back through barrels, a sled filled with cinderblocks that had to be drug around the arena by a rope attached to their saddle horn, and finally the scariest obstacle of them all. The "The Moving Drag" had everyone biting their nails to see if the horses had what it took to complete the challenge. A large flat platform being drug by a tractor, began moving as the horses approached. They had to get their horse to step onto the moving drag and stand quietly while it pulled them across the arena, in front of the grandstands and cheering crowd, and through "The Cowboy Curtain". The curtain was a series of brightly colored materials hanging in various layers and to the horses, looked as if they were about to be taken through a carwash. After they went through the finish line, the competitors had sixty seconds for a freestyle performance to generate bonus points and get the crowd going. Everything from bridle-less riding, full gallops ended with sliding stops, spins, and other performances to show off the true partnership these riders had with their horses.

The most entertaining came from those with some tricks up their sleeves. Bella Corcoran, one of our youngest competitors, stood on the back of her horse while hula hooping and jumped up on the back of another horse while it trotted past, standing behind it's rider while they moved around the arena. Mike Roberts who finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, stole the show by showing off his mounted-shooting skills. While on his horse, Mike shot a group of glowing balloons surrounding his horse (using blank ammunition with black powder, like that used in the 1800's. Brenda Hanson and her horse named "Chicken", proved to be a brave pair after all with their 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish. 4<sup>th</sup> place went to Sally Addington, whose horse attended another Fair that same day with her granddaughter. Hilda Cook won the Limited Division, taking home a beautiful horse blanket donated by Schneider's Saddlery.

The winner of the 2015 Horse and Rider Obstacle Challenge was a local resident of Huntsburg, Ohio. Casey Pierce and her horse "Gunner", showed off not only bravery and perfection at nearly every obstacle but got the crowd going wild when her freestyle consisted of Gunner riding the Moving Drag around the arena, without any bridle, and without any rider. Casey stood in the center of the ring and waved and he cruised around while the crowd whistled and cheered, hoping the judges would give them the highest score. We can only imagine what Rich will have up his sleeve for next years, Great Geauga County Fair.

