



One, Final Win

Wisconsin junior Grace Link takes home top showmanship honors in the competitive contest.

by Karen Hiltbrand, American Angus Association

There is no higher honor as a junior Angus member than to be named champion showman at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). This year, Grace Link from Deerfield, Wis., joined that elite group.

In 2014 Link traveled to Indianapolis to attend her first NJAS. Now as a winner of one of the most competitive showmanship competitions in the country, she proudly says that it was due to every show she attended prior to this one that helped her harness this win. Link maneuvered through the contest with confidence and composure which assisted her in catching the three judges' votes.

"This was the cap on top of my show career," Link says. "This was probably the last showmanship contest I'll participate in, and I want to congratulate all of the other participants, as well as thank my family for everything they have done for me."

Many junior Angus members from across the country dream about capturing the title of champion showman at NJAS. Simply getting selected to represent your home state is no small feat, let alone placing in the once-in-a-lifetime contest. The preliminary round consisted of two delegates from each state that made up four heats on Thursday, July

18, where the top 15 showmen and women were selected.



Grace Link, Deerfield, Wis., (right) won first place showmanship honors, receiving the prestigious Dean Hurlbut Award, in the 2019 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, hosted in conjunction with the National Junior Angus Show. Presenting the Silver Revere bowl is Cindy Ahearn, American Angus Auxiliary president. The top five winners also received a monetary award from the Ham James Memorial Fund.

"I honestly wasn't really nervous during the final round," she says. "But I got more nervous when the judges came out to give their comments."

The finals were hosted Saturday, July 20, where the top five showmen and women

were selected. Every year, the top showman at the NJAS is honored with the Dean Hurlbut Award, named after the man who organized the very first national showmanship competition in 1967.

"I don't think it's hit me that I have actually won yet," Link says. "I've been showing Angus cattle for the last eight years, and everything I've learned during this time has helped me get to this point."

Tough for judges, too

Carolyn Gazda, Kristopher Lynn and Jake Tiedeman carefully evaluated exhibitors on their handling of their animals, their ability to follow instructions, and courtesy and sportsmanship in the show ring. Past American Angus Association President Charlie



WIN, PLACE & SHOWING FOR THE PURPLE



Boyd served as the surrogate judge. During the preliminary round, exhibitors used their own cattle; but later during the finals, juniors had to exhibit a heifer selected by show officials to see how well they could present an unfamiliar animal.

Every year the judges for the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest are precisely selected to evaluate the prestigious competition, and this year was no different. Gazda has an interesting perspective. In 1982 she was a participant in the contest, years later as a parent she watched her two daughters compete and now she served as one of the three judges.

"I knew this would be one of the hardest things I'd ever have to do," Gazda says. "And after today you all [the exhibitors] proved me right."

All three judges agreed the competition was extremely high and each contestant should be extremely

proud. The Angus breed is going to be left in good hands by the upcoming generation, says Lynn as he comments on the quality of this year's showmanship contestants.

"Champions are not made today, they are made in the hours, weeks and years leading up to this day," Tiedeman says. "We are all extremely impressed and we appreciate the level of competition you all brought today."

Following Link in the top five were: Bryce Fitzgerald, West Grove, Pa., second place; Cara Smith, Pleasant Garden, N.C., third place; Lauren Parks, Brookfield, Mo., fourth place; and Rylie Melancon, Woodville, Miss., fifth place.

The three showmen who received honorable mentions were Evan



Henning, Janesville, Wis.;
Caroline Mayer, Peterson, Minn.;
and Abby Leachman, Toston, Mont.



The 53rd annual National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest brought together 49 of the breed's top young showmen this year, and it is considered an honor to be among those competing.

The top 15 showmen in the 2019 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest (from left) are Bryce Fitzgerald, West Grove, Pa.; Caroline Cowles, Rockfield, Ky.; Madison Sundsbak, Des Lacs, N.D.; Austin Vieselmeyer, Amherst, Colo.; Tyler Bush, Britton, S.D.; Emma Troyer, Kalona, Iowa; Cara Smith, Pleasant Garden, N.C.; Alisa Friesen, Arnett, Okla.; Molly Cooksey, Roggen, Colo.; Grace Link, Deerfield, Wis.; Rylie Melancon, Woodville, Miss.; Sarah Harris, Buchanan, Va.; Kirsten Brown, Cookeville, Tenn.; Lauren Parks, Brookfield, Mo.; and Katie Harris, Stanton, Texas.