

SAWYER SHINES IN SHOWMANSHIP

Nebraska junior Jessica Sawyer wins millennium showmanship contest.



Tom Wells, Hamilton, Texas; **Kay Hartman**, Tecumseh, Neb.; and **Dennis Eastin**, Gretna, Va., evaluated 47 competitors hailing from 28 different states during the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.



The top five showmen in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest were (from left) **Jessica Sawyer**, Bassett, Neb., first; **Kyle Hain**, Seward, Neb., second; **Jennifer Beck**, Louisburg, N.C., third; **Brittney Burns**, Kickapoo, Ill., fourth; and **Ryan Sweeney**, Mason, Mich., fifth.

Jessica Sawyer, Bassett, Neb., captured the coveted title of Top Showman during the 34th National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest July 14-15 in Des Moines, Iowa. A total of 47 contestants from 28 states competed for top honors during the contest conducted in conjunction with the 2000 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

Sawyer received the traditional \$350 from the Hamilton James Memorial Fund and a silver Revere bowl from the American Angus Auxiliary. This year, two new prizes were added to the list of awards given annually to the champion showman. Sawyer's Revere bowl was engraved and presented as the Dean Hurlbut Award in honor of the recently retired American Angus Association director of activities. The Jake White family presented Sawyer with a custom-designed trophy buckle in his honor.

Another Nebraska junior, Kyle Hain, Seward, followed Sawyer as the second-place showman. He was awarded \$250. Jennifer Beck, Louisburg, N.C., received \$175 for her third-place finish.

Brittney Burns, Kickapoo, Ill., took fourth place and received \$125. Ryan Sweeney, Mason, Mich., won \$100 for fifth place.

The cash prizes awarded to the top five showmen are provided on behalf of the Hamilton James Memorial Fund established in memory of Angus enthusiast and auctioneer Ham James. The American Angus Auxiliary presented each of the top five finalists with a silver Revere bowl.

The contestants were evaluated on skill in handling the animal, ability to follow instructions, use of equipment, courtesy and sportsmanship, and general appearance. The contestants did not show their own animals, but drew for animals owned by other exhibitors at the show.

The judges for the event were Tom Wells, Hamilton, Texas; Kay Hartman, Tecumseh, Neb.; and Dennis Eastin, Gretna, Va.

The contestants competed in four preliminary rounds before 15 finalists were named. The 15 finalists competed in the final round for the top honors.

Other finalists rounding out the top 15 showmen were George Richburg, Auburn, Ala.; Lee Ann McGee, Lavaca, Ark.; Angie Sinclair, Fort Collins, Colo.; Angela Finnestad, Belvidere, Ill.; Kyle Gillooly, Washington, Ind.; Jeff Covell, Frederick, Md.; Heath Johnson, Tupelo, Miss.; Lance Thompson, Russellville, Mo.; Mike Hafner, Orlando, Okla.; and Becky Stuckey, Southmayd, Texas.



Selected as the top 15 finalists in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest were (back row, from left) **George Richburg**, Auburn, Ala.; **Kyle Hain**, Seward, Neb.; **Mike Hafner**, Orlando, Okla.; **Becky Stuckey**, Southmayd, Texas; **Lance Thompson**, Russellville, Mo.; **Angie Sinclair**, Fort Collins, Colo.; **Kyle Gillooly**, Washington, Ind.; **Jeff Covell**, Frederick, Md.; (front row, from left) **Heath Johnson**, Tupelo, Miss.; **Lee Ann McGee**, Lavaca, Ark.; **Ryan Sweeney**, Mason, Mich.; **Jessica Sawyer**, Bassett, Neb.; **Angela Finnestad**, Belvidere, Ill.; **Brittney Burns**, Kickapoo, Ill.; and **Jennifer Beck**, Louisburg, N.C.

SHOWMANSHIP: THE ONE TO WATCH

Jessica Sawyer used to be the one watching showmanship winners, now she's the one to watch.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER RYAN



Jessica is currently attending Kansas State University majoring in animal science with a minor in leadership studies. She plans to attend nursing or medical school after graduation.

After her first National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in 1990, Jessica Sawyer set a goal for herself — to win the NJAS Top Showman title.

She never has forgotten the calm movements that helped Andra Janssen Campbell of Wilton, Calif., win that year's showmanship contest. Jessica kept the image of Andra in mind as she competed in the 2000 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest. Even though Jessica has won the coveted first-place position, she says she still doesn't believe she's finally done it.

"They called my number and said my name, and I had this point of disbelief," Jessica recalls. "I've known I wanted to do this for a long time; for as long as I've been showing this has been a goal of mine."

Although Jessica admits she is a competitive showman, she says she never could live up to Andra's standard.

"I remember watching Andy Janssen show when I was younger. My parents always

told me to 'remember Andy Janssen,' and try to be as calm and cool as she was. Just to keep my composure. That's an obsolete goal for me now because I know I can't ever attain it."

Even though Andra was a role model for Jessica, she says she doesn't see herself in Andra's place quite yet.

"I've always watched the showmanship contest, and I suppose people were probably watching me. It's a humbling feeling. I don't expect to be a role model. I just try to present the animal to the best of my ability."

Working toward success

Jessica says she didn't singularly work toward the goal of top showman, but she worked at it through years of simply being around cattle and in the ring.

"I spent 10 years in the showing, and I went down to the barn every day and worked with the heifers. I've always taken five or six head of cattle

to each show and each one had a different personality, so that helped me learn to read and work with all kinds of cattle."

"Figuring out how to deal with different personalities and situations has helped me at work, too," says Jessica, who works at a nursing home. She says dealing with situations at work is a lot like dealing with the stress of the showing.

"Knowing that you don't always have the perfect situation and learning to improvise has been a great lesson ... I've had to deal with some really stressful situations and I know that, if I stay composed, it will be over in 10 minutes and everything is going to be fine."

A family connection

Jessica's goal to be top showman was strongly influenced by her family's background in the ring. Her mom, Becky Sawyer, was a state alternate for the national showmanship contest during her time as a junior member.

"I remember wanting to go [to the national showmanship contest] so bad," Becky recalls. "But, of course, the two representatives from our state weren't about to give up their trip to the show. Seeing Jessica win it was the most thrilling moment I've had watching her career."

Jessica says her family's knowledge of showmanship helped her enormously. She says her parents kept pushing her to learn, but to learn on her own.

"The first year I showed, I was 8, and I had this enormous heifer ... [my dad] really pushed me to learn on my own and not settle because things are challenging.

"The whole family

participates in showing. I've shown in 4-H, my parents showed in 4-H, and my grandfather showed in 4-H," Jessica says. "The junior heifer show has been our family vacation for 10 years. We all work together to make it happen."

The winning touch

Kay Hartman, showmanship judge from Tecumseh, Neb., says Jessica's control in the ring helped her stand out from the other contestants.

"She always had her heifer under control and set up when I looked at her. If her heifer had a problem, she knew how to correct it. She was in total control the whole time and very smooth and calm."

Hartman says the competition was tough among the top five candidates and each of them handled the pressure well.

"As a judge, there is a certain style and technique that every individual looks for and sees in a contestant — how they handle themselves in the ring and how they handle their heifer in the ring. There is a certain chemistry and you connect out there, that's what I go on," Hartman says. "If I was at a show and we were short a showman, I wouldn't hesitate to grab any one of the top three individuals, and I would know they could do it."

Tom Wells, showmanship judge from Hamilton, Texas, said Jessica's calm demeanor helped Jessica and her heifer operate as one unit — a major factor in judging.

"A person and their animal have to operate like one unit," Wells says. "They're all nervous, at least all the good ones get nervous, but you have to control those nerves and harness that to your advantage."



Jessica says she didn't singularly work toward the goal of top showman, but she worked at it through 10 years of showing and being around cattle all her life. "I've always taken five or six head of cattle to each show and each one had a different personality, so that helped me learn to read and work with all kinds of cattle," she says.

Otherwise that feeling will go right through your lead strap and to the animal."

New distinctions

In addition to the title of top showman, Jessica received the traditional \$350 from the Hamilton James Memorial Fund and a silver Revere bowl from the American Angus Auxiliary.

This year two new prizes were added to the list of awards given annually to the champion showman. Jessica's Revere bowl was engraved and presented as the Dean Hurlbut Award, in honor of the past American Angus Association director of activities. The Jake White family presented Jessica with a custom-designed trophy buckle in his memory.

"It was such an honor to receive those awards," Jessica says. "I thought very highly of Jake White and knew him for many years. He was one of the greatest cattle people there is. Both he and his wife, Eleanor, were very neat people."

Jessica says Hurlbut was an influential part of her life, and she feels humbled that she would receive the first

showmanship award in his name.

"He's organized every Angus event since I've been involved and had a huge impact on the Association. It was always nice to walk through the barn and see his friendly face."

Hurlbut says presenting the award to Jessica was meaningful to him because he knows it was a challenge she's been working to meet all her life.

"I knew her father, grandfather and great-grandfather and see this as a fitting way to close out my last showmanship contest," he says. "These are leaders from across the nation, and this is a goal a lot of them have been striving for all their lives."



PHOTO BY ANGUS JOURNAL STAFF

Jessica's Revere bowl was engraved and presented as the Dean Hurlbut Award in honor of the past American Angus Association director of activities. Hurlbut, left, and American Angus Auxiliary President Yvonne Hinman presented the award to Jessica.



Jessica's goal to be top showman was strongly influenced by her family's background in the ring. Her father, Arlen Sawyer, also competed in showmanship contests during his time as a junior member.