

Nerves of Steel

Showmanship champion plays it cool.

Story & photos by *Cara Bieroth*

With the competition complete, contestants returned the borrowed cattle to their waiting owners and filed back into the arena to await the announcement of the winner.

Fifteen finalists leaned on their showsticks and shuffled the chips on the showring floor as each judge briefly critiqued the class. The solemn row came to attention as the winners of the 2003 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest were announced.

Fifth ...

Fourth ...

Third ...

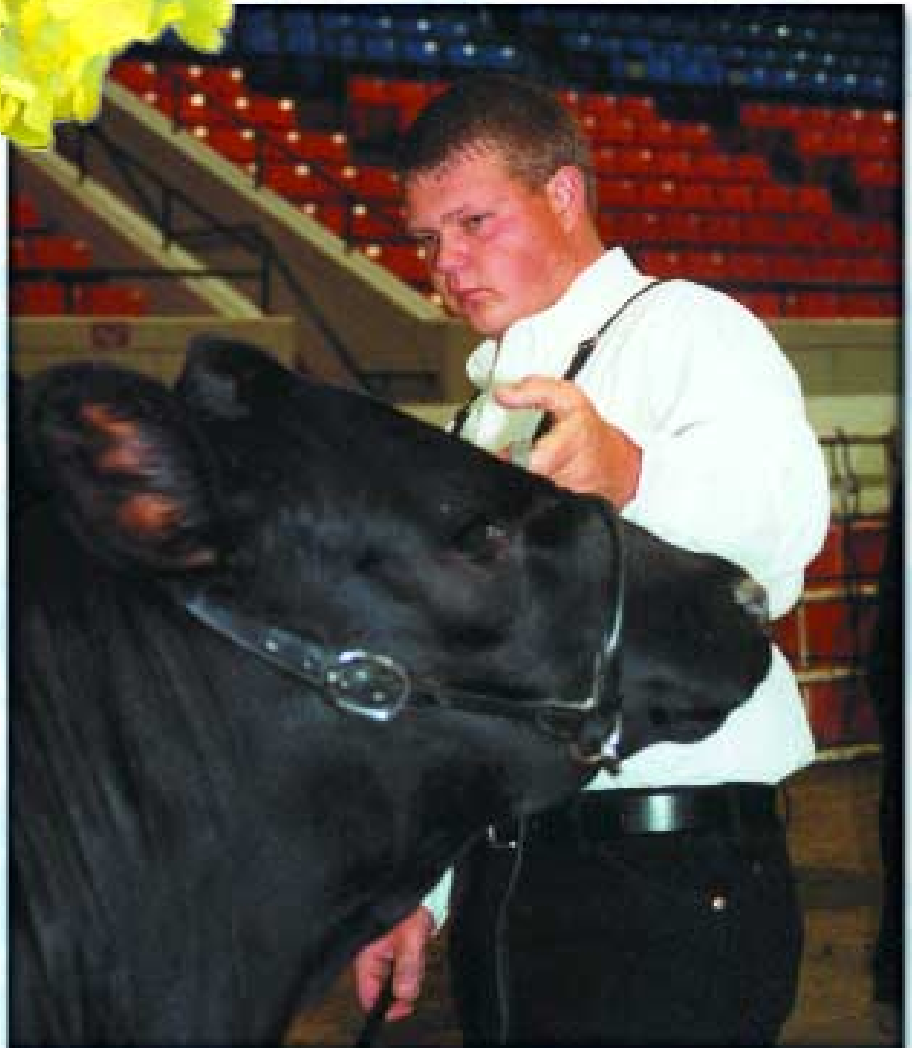
Second ...

The arena grew silent as everyone gathered at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) waited for the name of the champion showman.

As the announcer read "Seth Buckley, White Post, Va.," the crowd erupted into cheers. Judges and fellow contestants made their way to congratulate the winner.

But Buckley's expression never changed. He maintained the same look of seriousness and determination that he had exhibited throughout the competition.

"When he wants something done, he will do it, and it's done with perfection, yet he is so laid back that it is tough to get a smile out of him," says Virginia advisor Robin Dehaven. "He has always been like that, always laid back, but a good guy all the way around. He has always been willing to do the behind-the-scenes stuff." She says that even



► Seth Buckley, White Post, Va., familiarizes himself with his designated heifer before the competition.

though Buckley is more comfortable behind the scenes, when brought into the spotlight, he shines in spite of himself.

One to remember

Last year, Buckley set a goal for himself. He told Dehaven that he would make his last year as a member of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) a year to remember. "At Eastern Regionals, he said that he was going to go out with a bang, and he has," Dehaven says.

Buckley's accomplishment is one that he will also share with his state, being the first member from Virginia to win the national showmanship title. He is only the fourth Virginia contestant to make the top five.

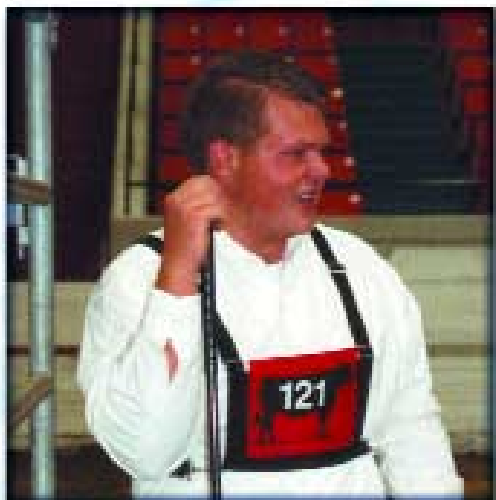
"I was a little stunned," Buckley says. "I really didn't show much of an expression because I didn't know what to do. I was just

shocked that I had won, and so was everyone from my state. When I told people back home that I had won, they didn't believe me."

Buckley admits that he has been working toward winning the national showmanship competition for a long time.

"I got the idea in my head about three years ago," he says. "I knew I would get a chance to compete at the national show sometime, but it is something that I have always tried to win because that is something that I can improve without spending a lot of money. It's just something you learn and get better at. It's me and not the animal."

Buckley grew up on his family's fourth-generation commercial cattle farm with his older brother, Randolph, and parents, Samuel and Alice Buckley. He began his



► Somebody finally got a smile out of the man who never smiles.



► Leading the pack, Buckley makes his way around the ring.

show career when he was 9 years old, showing crossbred steers at the county fair. It wasn't until he turned 15 that he became involved in the NJAA, showing purebred cattle with the encouragement of his neighbors and close friends, the Carper family.

"He started showing steers for my family when he was about 16 years old," Tommy Carper says. "I helped him with them and gave him some advice on showmanship. When he started out, he couldn't win showmanship at our county fair, but now look at what he has accomplished."

The two young men have been close friends, growing up only a mile from one another and showing cattle together. "He probably showed some of my best steers," Carper says.

"He is an awesome showman every day," Dehaven says. "When the judges want someone who is laid back and relaxed, looking right on target, right on the spot, Seth is there. Some judges don't like him being so laid back, but his cattle are always to perfection. It just depends on the judge."

Judges' views

Buckley had what it took to be a champion in the showing during the final round of the showmanship competition, smile or no smile. "I have to admit I never even noticed his expression," says showmanship judge Jane Satee, Montague, Texas. "If the contestants can do the job, it really doesn't matter."

Buckley showed his expertise as well as a calm and professional manner in the showing, which made the judges stop and take notice. "It's not really a quality that just jumps out at you," Satee explains. "It is more of a fault-free approach that he exhibited. He was just always 100%."

Showmanship judge Scott Foster, Niles,

Mich., appreciated his calm and collected manner, as well as a smoothness in the way he showed his heifer.

"He wasn't overly serious," he says. "He was just very calm. You almost didn't see him, but his animal was always set, and he was always in line. He showed a lot of confidence in his ability to show. He had that air about himself that said he could show anything and win."

Satee described Buckley as an expert on the basics. "He completely understands them," she says. "That means foot position and handling the showstick; head position and control of the animal; and showing etiquette."

Satee pointed out that Buckley knew what needed to be done to make an animal look its best. "He just becomes a part of the picture of that animal. He is not the picture, and that is important," she says. "Some kids

go out there and show themselves more than the animal they are given to show. That is not what showing is about, even if it is showmanship."

Buckley credits his success to the supporters and role models in his life. His parents have been his financial supporters, while his brother has taken on a major role of aiding and accompanying him to shows. Buckley says he appreciates the encouragement and support that he has gotten from the Carpers; Dennis Easton, Gretna, Va.; and others who have helped him throughout his showmanship career.

Buckley says he will now hang up his showmanship hat, having seen the view from the top. "I have reached as far as I can go," he adds. "I wanted to go out on a winning note, and this is it."



► Showmen stop to congratulate Buckley before exiting the showing.