



Preparing for the Crown

Five contestants share how they prepared for the Miss American Angus contest.

Story & photos by *Kasey Miller*, associate editor

A crown, sash, red blazer, crystal pin, luggage and opportunity for travel all await the young woman crowned Miss American Angus. What does it take to be chosen? The five contestants for the 2013 contest — Esther McCabe, Elk City, Kan.; Kendra Merriman, Lowell, Mich.; Emily Velisek, Gaithersburg, Md.; Kayla Widerman, Good Hope, Ill.; and Tylee Jo Williams,

Clarendon, Texas — share their preparation methods.

Elements of the contest

The Miss American Angus contest consists of a prepared speech, interview, impromptu questions and a written exam testing the contestants' knowledge of the beef industry, explain sisters Lindsey DeWitte and

Whitney Renfro, co-chairwomen of the Miss American Angus (MAA) Committee for the American Angus Auxiliary. All segments of the competition take place during Angus events at the North American Livestock Exposition (NAILE).

Each contestant is asked to give a speech ranging from 5 to 7 minutes. The speech is based on a topic chosen by the contest committee and provided to each contestant in September. This year's topic was "our collective responsibility." The speech contest is open to an audience.

The private, individual interviews consist of the contestant and the three judges, plus two MAA committee members, one of which is a timer. The interviews last about 20 minutes.

The impromptu questions are asked after the speech and require each contestant to spontaneously answer and think on her feet. The two questions, one industry-related and the other character-based, are prepared ahead of time by the judges and committee



Esther McCabe



Kendra Merriman



Emily Velisek

chairperson. Contestants have no knowledge of the content of the questions.

All five contestants are asked to respond to the same questions after their speech to prevent other contestants from hearing their answers.

The written test is developed from an informational preparation packet sent to each contestant in October. This test is given on Saturday after orientation.

The new Miss American Angus is crowned Monday during the Super-point Roll of Victory (ROV) Angus Bull Show immediately prior to the selection of grand champion bull. The contestants attend almost every Angus event during the NAILE, so they are kept quite busy, but what do they do to prepare before they arrive in Louisville?

Preparation at home

The contestants for Miss American Angus are named at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in July, which gives them little more than three months to prepare. To add to the stress of preparation, all five of the young ladies competing this year started college in the fall after the NJAS. However, involvement in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) helped long before they were named contestants.

“I’ve been preparing for this ever since I’ve been in the Association,” says Williams.

McCabe explains that being active in the NJAA and participating in contests help with the scholarship rankings and thereby getting picked as a contestant, but ultimately help the most in preparing for the contest. She says that involvement helps teach poise, public speaking, thinking on your feet and more.

Widerman and Williams mention that serving as state royalty helps with poise and etiquette in the showing.

Attending NJAA conferences such as Raising the Bar, Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) and shows nationwide



► Miss American contestants assist with showing duties during the junior and ROV shows at NAILE. The contestants say serving as state royalty helps develop poise in the ring.

helps in networking within the Angus industry and in developing leadership skills, says Merriman.

All five ladies agree that studying the informational packet sent by the Auxiliary was the most helpful because, they each say, “it covers everything.” However, there are many other resources available to the Angus community. Merriman says she read through *Angus Journals* to stay current on Association and industry news, and beef management practices. Velisek says she visited www.angus.org to get familiar with Association happenings and resources. McCabe also recommends studying current events, both nationally and within the beef industry.

Past queens and past contestants are resources, and the current contestants say they are often happy to help. Velisek

adds that Brooke Harward, 2012 Miss American Angus, offered assistance to all five contestants. Merriman says that past judges can be resources, and McCabe adds that industry officials at the state level are great resources.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help from past teachers. Past teachers and FFA advisors can help by looking at speeches or practicing interviews, says Merriman. Even though the contestants have only been in college for less than a full semester, professors can be resources, as can a university career center, notes Williams.

While being in college may be added stress, the contestants all assert that it actually helps. Widerman explains that having a block schedule, instead of the straight seven-hour schedule as in high school, allows for more time to study for the contest when it is most convenient. Velisek and McCabe agree that because the packet is sent in September, it gives a few weeks to settle into college before really hunkering down with the contest material.

The best advice that the girls received, and can now offer from their own experience through the contest, is to be yourself. McCabe adds to stay as relaxed as possible, and preparation at home helps with that. Know why you’re competing in the contest, Merriman asserts, and make sure you are competing for you and not for anyone else.

Even though only one contestant can win, all of the girls say they gained valuable knowledge and friendships from the experience.



Kayla Widerman



Tylee Jo Williams