

# Teen performance horse exhibitor always displays a stable attitude

JUSTIN MUCH  
STAYTON MAIL

The corgi-Aussie mix puppy, Bailey, yawned once, then licked fingers and lounged as she sat in 15-year-old Emmersen Cook's lap beneath a shady parasol on the back porch of the Cook family home Friday.

In a sense, Bailey is a prize, or perhaps a reward for multiple prizes Emmersen has earned these past few months while competing from atop one of her Paradise Stables horses. She's earned enough hardware that her mother and trainer, Karmen Cook, mentioned that her father, Dan Cook, may have to build a separate shed to store it all.

Bailey won't be stored in that shed. Paradise Stables' manicured grounds with adjacent stables and arena on the west fringe of Silverton are happy, if hard-working, environs for humans and critters alike.

"Horses are a lot of work; there is a lot of effort involved behind the scenes before that 5-minute (showing) in the arena," said Karmen, who has owned and operated Paradise Stables for 11 years and trained riders for a quarter of a century. "Lots of long, hard hours cleaning and taking care of the horses behind the scenes that non-equestrians are unaware of."

Emmersen could fill a trophy cabinet of testimony to that hard work if her modest demeanor afforded such. But it took a bit of prodding from Karmen just to nudge her inside the house to fetch one medallion for an illustrative example of what is presented to performance horse exhibitors.

By the numbers, Emmersen's list of spring plaudits is impressive, even to equestrian-for-dummies ears. The Silverton High School sophomore-to-be won seven medallions at this month's Marion County Fair: High Point Intermediate, High Point Jumping, High Point Ranch Horse, High Point Reinsmanship, High Point Driving, High Point Combined Driving, and High Point Training Level Dressage.

Of course, a little twist in the fair competition was that Emmersen had to compete with a different horse than the one she'd been competing with during this past school-year's Oregon High School Equestrian Team competitions, then again at the Pinto Horse Association of America's World Show, June 12-24.

She won a World Championship and a Reserve Championship as well as multiple top-5 placings in Tulsa, riding her trusty, if quirky, companion "Eliot," a 15-year-old, pale-blue-eyed paint.

Emmersen also rode Eliot through arenas of high school competitions this season, including the Champion Performance Rider out of 84 vying in the North Valley District. She was also the district's Champion Rookie and won medals and state qualifying status in all of her performance events.

Emmersen won Hi Point Reserve Champion out of 156 riders at state, then joined the top-5 Oregon riders, along with Washington's top 5, to compete in



Emmersen Cook, 15, of Silverton is a rising star in the equestrian arena.

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the Pacific North West Invitational Championship where she won Bronze in Trail, Silver in Western Horsemanship and Silver in Huntseat.

Following the Tulsa trip, its long travel and two-week competitions, Eliot was rewarded with a respite.

At the fair Emmersen worked with versatile quarter-horse, Sally, a 24-year-old Paradise Stables veteran who has twice been snatched out of her retirement pasture to perform in a pinch.

Sally's veteran poise impressed equestrian officials at the fair, but Karmen thinly veils her trainer/mother's pride in underscoring the importance of its rider.

"A lot of people think it's the horse" Karmen said, elaborating the importance of riding skills; technique, but beyond that is the feel, connection, and intuition with the horse.

Karmen stressed that her calm-countenanced daughter demonstrates those intangibles.

"It's like, just because you have a nice pair of running shoes doesn't mean you are going to win the race," Emmersen analogized.

Emmersen has been riding since about age 5. She recalls crying once

while graduating to a canter stride, prodded on by her mother. But that passed.

"Sometimes that can be a big bump for kids," Karmen said. "It's a hurdle they have to get over, and once they do they love it."

Karmen has trained scores of riders from around the Willamette Valley. She insists they take on a number of different challenges, become a complete rider rather than trying to specialize in one or two events.

"There is no shortcut to being a great horse rider," she said, adding that "One thing you can't teach a rider is the feel."

Emmersen exhibits that feel. Perhaps more importantly, she exhibits a love for riding.

"I plan on riding forever; I want to go to the Olympics," she said.

Karmen said there are a lot of different disciplines in riding, and the idea is to work at many events; be versatile and then you can narrow down your competitive focus.

"Only problem is," Emmersen interjected, "I haven't found one I don't like." [jmuch@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:jmuch@statesmanjournal.com) or cell 503-508-8157 or follow at twitter.com/justinmuch



Emmersen Cook's list of plaudits is impressive

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