

Caitlyn Schroeder

Concludes Her Junior Exhibitor Career at California Futurity



Caitlyn Schroeder and CH First French Kiss closed out her junior exhibitor career at California Futurity.

by Leeann Mione

LAS VEGAS, Nev. - Caitlyn Schroeder started riding when she was five years old when she was introduced to 4-H and horses by her paternal grandparents Bob and Francie Schroeder. Caitlyn was a horse-crazy girl and when she was eight, she began to take lessons with Brenda Corbett at Corbett Stables in Bothell, Wash. She started riding Arabs before she began taking lessons on the Saddlebreds and her love affair with the breed began.

Her parents Rob and Denise Schroeder fully supported her love of horses and when she was 16 they purchased her first horse; a spotted gelding named

Rhythm And Rock. Corbett selected him from Erickson Stables where Gail's daughter Kimberly had been showing him successfully in the park pleasure division.

Caitlyn's success in the show ring with "Storm" was short lived however.

They were only able to show at C-Fair Charity and Key Classic in 2014 before he was hurt. Caitlyn spent the rest of the season without a horse to show.

During that period of recuperation, the Schroeder's decided to make the move to Erickson Stables and put Storm back in training with Gail and Kimberly, Caitlyn was able to lease a horse named Custom Blend (Blake) from Erickson customer Linda Bogart.

Caitlyn was approaching the end of her junior exhibitor career so Rob and Denise decided that it was time to purchase their daughter a nice, new show horse. Kimberly went on her first personal buying trip as head trainer to search with the family for Caitlyn's perfect horse.

Kimberly planned their buying trip after calling numerous barns to find out if they had anything they thought would work for Caitlyn. They visited several barns and tried many different horses, eventually finding one that they thought might work but there was someone ahead of them in line.

David Blevins, of Dreamcatcher Saddlebreds in Moorpark, Calif., was one of those trainers Kimberly called and he kept telling her he had a horse that would suit their needs perfectly.

"We don't show in southern California much so I didn't know the horse or David," said Kimberly. "He was three hours away and I told him that if the other horse became available we wouldn't be able to make the trip."

As it turned out the other horse was not available so the trip to Dreamcatcher Saddlebreds was arranged. From the beginning Caitlyn and CH First French Kiss were a perfect team. "She put her head in my arms and I felt the love," said Caitlyn. "She reminds me of the horse I leased named Blake before I got Storm. She's sweet like he was and I knew she was the one. It was meant to be."

Former owner Larry Witter loved the mare too and had much success with her in several different divisions under Blevins' direction. They were a popular and well-known team at shows on the west coast including Monterey Springfest, The Horse Show At Woodside, Del Mar Charity Fair, Santa Barbara National, California Futurity and Jingle Bell.

Caitlyn and her new teammate got right to work under Kimberly's direction. "Kimberly has taught me a lot," said Caitlyn. "Our first lesson, she started with the basics. She talks the whole time during our lessons and I like that. She always gives instructions and lets me know whether I'm doing something right or wrong. I like having the constant feedback so I don't have to guess what she's thinking. Gail is more like my mom. She always tries to emphasize that it's about having fun and doing my best. The ribbons don't matter. I know she always has my back."

Caitlyn went on to say that her mare has also taught her so much. "She's taught me to relax my hands and to give and take. I used to be so stressed but

she's really helped me calm down. Teaching her patterns has also helped me and she makes me trust her."

Purchased in May of this year, the team debuted at Far West Regional in Redmond, Ore. and won the Opportunity English Pleasure class. They then went to C-Fair Charity where they were named the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited Pleasure Grand Champions and champions.

Ordinarily they would have then headed to NWSA Fall Classic (Caitlyn is Vice-President of the NWSA Youth Group) but circumstances prevented that this year so the clients of Erickson Stables made the decision to come to California Futurity for the first time.

"I knew that it was a popular show," said Caitlyn. "I didn't know what to expect before we got here and I was nervous."

Gail Erickson elaborated on their decision. "We decided to come to this show knowing that it was very popular and we figured we'd have fun. That was an understatement. We had so much fun and are so impressed with how well we were treated by the show staff. They just went out of their way to make us feel welcome and no matter what we needed they made it happen. We were also so impressed at how steep, but friendly, the competition was."

Big classes and deep water make showing horses even more fun and Caitlyn and her mare had their work cut out for them in the show pleasure junior exhibitor division at California Futurity. "I loved that the ring has big wide turns," said Caitlyn. "My class (the 14-entry qualifier) was the biggest class I've ever shown in and I was just trying to find a spot on the rail."

Every time in the ring provides a learning experience and her rides amongst the stellar competition will hold her in good stead as she closes out her junior exhibitor career which now also includes being named the NWSA Equitation 14-17 High Point Champion as a result of her show ring successes with Frenchi. "I'm so excited to move into the amateur division with her and looking forward to next year," said Caitlyn.

Erickson Stables had a great weekend at the show to finish out their show season for 2015. Kimberly showed Melissa Olejniczak's weanling to win the weanling futurity class and took on the competition in the 15-entry trainer's



Grandfather Bob Schroeder, dad Rob Schroeder, mom Denise Schroeder and cousin Kealey Cox were on hand to watch Caitlyn navigate the huge classes in the junior exhibitor show pleasure division.

equitation class where she finished in the top five. She also rode Pinnacle's Victory Party, owned by Rhea Turner, to a top five ribbon in the 12-entry \$1000 added Five-Gaited Jackpot Stake.

Leaving Las Vegas on a high note, the group enthusiastically agrees that if all goes as planned the show will be on their calendar for next year. Caitlyn now has the winter to get ready to show as an amateur in 2016. Her sweet mare will no doubt rise to the challenge and they've got a big group of cheerleaders led by Larry Witter and the Erickson Stables group ready to cheer them on. As the pendant that Caitlyn wears says; "The Love between a girl and her ponies is forever." Her love for Blake, Storm and Frenchi will last forever as will her memories of a great junior exhibitor career. Amateur division... here they come!



Gail Erickson (back row, third from left) and Kimberly Erickson (front row, third from right) brought their Erickson Stables group from Washington to California Futurity for the first time and everyone had a great time at the competitive horse show.