

Constant Efforts To Improve Horse Skills Take Buhler FFA Member To State Award

"I always compete against myself when I'm in a horse show. I never worry about how the other contestants are doing, or even how the judge is going to place me. My only concern is doing the very best I can and improving myself and my horse."

It's that attitude, also emphasized to other riders she's assisting, that helped take Jessica Grinstead to the equine science placement recognition she received at the Kansas FFA Convention in Manhattan.

Daughter of Jerry and Sheri Grinstead of Hutchinson, Grinstead is a member of the Buhler FFA Chapter. Her FFA advisor, John Clark, ardently described: "Jessica is extremely dedicated to the responsibilities of her horses and is committed to improving her skills and experiences to the highest degree."

From being mounted on a

horse for the first time with her dad when she was just three months old, Grinstead was riding alone by the time she was three years old. "I always liked horses, and I enrolled in the 4-H horse project and started taking riding lessons when I was seven," she remembered.

Although her parents were more inclined to the rodeo aspects of horses such as roping and barrel racing, Grinstead had a stronger fondness for the horse showing. "I worked hard at learning my horsemanship skill, and my parents finally decided to buy me a real live show horse, a sorrel Quarter Horse mare named Super Sonic Sis."

With assistance from trainer Karen Russell, Grinstead showed successfully in 4-H and open showmanship and pleasure competition. "I even went to a couple of registered Quarter Horse shows," she pointed out.

When Grinstead wanted to progress even more in showing, she acquired a chestnut overo Paint mare called Cant Zip My Rockies. "She is really little, just 14 hands tall, but I'm just five-foot-one. I love to ride her, so we make quite the pair," Grinstead evaluated.

As the original mare went into partial retirement, a third show horse, a red roan overo Paint gelding called Super Sonic Clue, was acquired for halter competition. "He's a cool horse," Grinstead indicated.

Because each horse is for its own unique purpose, they require different management. "There is a specific diet, exercise and handling program for the various horses depending on their disciplines," Grinstead explained. "My show mare requires a high energy ration to keep her in shape, and other horses get various energy and protein levels.

"I check the weights on the horses once a week," she stated.

While expanding her own abilities through working with more trainers, Grinstead found that each had their own personal technique. "I initially saw this as a disadvantage, but it has also given me the opportunity to learn and use different methods. I now use the ones which are more efficient and effective for me," she clarified.

Due to her own successes and obvious knowledge of horses, Grinstead was soon in high demand assisting others with training and managing their horses. "I work with beginning riders and unmanageable show horses," she related. One day a week is spent with beginners illustrating various training methods to allow them to reach their goals.

"If necessary, I school the horse to provide greater response to the client," Grinstead continued. "At the show, I provide client advice, help groom their horses and provide rail instruction."

Always desiring to improve her own abilities, Grinstead works closely with Kevin Hood, trainer at Westmoreland. "I try to go to his place with my horse and spend several days when I can so Kevin can critique us. I also watch and learn from

him as he handles the other horses," she noted.

Upon enrollment in the vocational agricultural program at Buhler High School, Grinstead quickly became involved in the FFA chapter and especially in the horse judging events. "My trainer said once you could differentiate a high quality show horse from a low quality one, you would be able to competitively show top show horses.

"I began judging horses so that I could more efficiently pick good horses, but I've really become excited and now have a passion for participating in judging contests," Grinstead verified. "I love judging because I enjoy watching high quality horses perform. There is nothing more thrilling than seeing a horse that is truly an athlete."

Her enthusiasm for judging has paid dividends for



Exact saddle stirrup fit is essential to correct horsemanship, and Jessica Grinstead of the Buhler FFA Chapter assists one of the many young people she helps with their horses to make sure the adjustment is correct before a practice session.

Grinstead, who with team members in both FFA and 4-H competitions has won not only local, district and state contests but has also done well in national events.

"I and the team were pleased to place high at both the Youth Quarter Horse World Show and the National Western Stock Show," Grinstead commented.

That success has continued into recent months. "My FFA team won the state FFA

horse judging contest, and my 4-H team was also first at the state 4-H horse judging contest, both this year," she added.

For those top placings, Grinstead and other team members have qualified to compete at the National FFA Convention and the Youth Quarter Horse World Show, respectively.

Special credit was given to Extension agent Kendra Baehler and vo-ag instructor

Justin Souser for their coaching and assistance in horse judging. Grinstead has even been called upon to judge some horse shows.

As if she isn't busy enough with horses, Grinstead has excelled in both 4-H and FFA and served in many leadership positions. The state 4-H horse project award winner in 2006, she is currently a member of the Kansas 4-H Horse Program Action Committee.

"I've served several offices in each organization, and was the district FFA vice president," she said. "I was president of the Reno County Horse Club, and I'm now the co-leader of the county 4-H horse project, with my Mom."

Additionally, Grinstead, a 4-H Key Award winner, has a job weekend nights working for a local eating establishment.

"Most of my time is spent working with horses and horse owners, but I ride my own horse at least three times a week without fail," she declared.

Still personally participating successfully in registered Paint shows as well as open and 4-H competitions, Grinstead has competed in 4-H

events at the Kansas State Fair, where she has won the Western pleasure class. "That was really a thrill for me," she admitted.

Planning to continue assisting others with their knowledge of horses, Grinstead's "special student" now is her 11-year-old brother, Jacob. "He's never had to work at anything, but Jacob has become interested in horses," she related. "He likes halter and is beginning to ride some. He's more natural than I am, and will be much better in the show ring."

Through diverse experiences with horses, Grinstead found out much about horse illnesses, injuries, and unsoundness, which helped her decide on a career. "I intend to become a veterinarian and work at a high profile equine health facility. This experience will allow me to reach my long-term professional goal of owning an equine sports veterinary clinic.

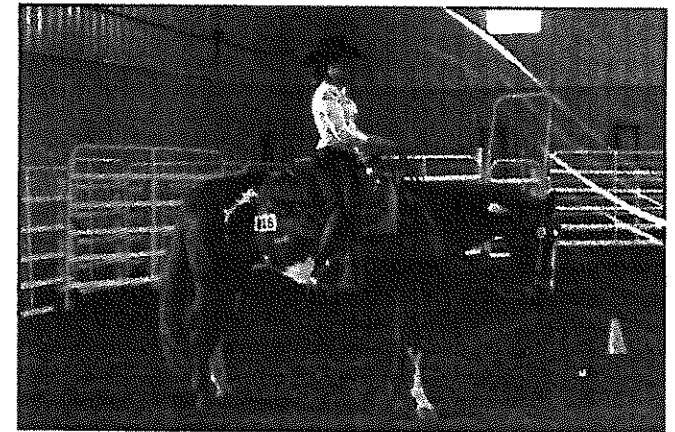
"My plans are for the clinic to showcase regenerative medicines, kinesiology, equine chiropractics and specialized nutrition plans," Grinstead pledged.

That's in the future though, as the scholastic honors high school graduate is now headed to Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College at Miami. "I have a horse judging team scholarship there, and will be majoring in pre-veterinary medicine.

"I then will probably transfer to Oklahoma State University, because they seem to have a better equine veterinary program than Kansas State University,

which has always been my favorite university," Grinstead shared.

Horses will always be closely tied to Grinstead's life. "I have a personal goal to become a recognized judge for the Paint, Quarter Horse, Reining and Snaffle Bit associations. I plan to marry and have children who are active in the equine industry," she summarized. led upon to judge some horse shows.



There's no end to learning and improving one's horsemanship skills, according to the state FFA equine science placement award recipient Jessica Grinstead of the Buhler FFA Chapter. She's shown competing in a Western horsemanship class on one of her Paint Horses.