



Shelley Fitzgerald and her partner, DeRoy White, won the Futurity Pro with a two-round sort of 17 head in 105.82 seconds.

Priefert/RSNC National Finals

A Numbers Game

Ranch sorters came together to compete at the RSNC National Finals that was held in Fort Worth for the first time.

By Amber Hodge

Fort Worth, Texas, Will Rogers Memorial Center hosted the Priefert/Ranch Sorting National Championships (RSNC) National Finals, June 4-9, for the first time this year. Contestants came from all over the country to compete in various events. Among them was another show first, a \$30,000-added Breeders Incentive Futurity and Maturity, held in conjunction with the National Finals and World Series events.

Just playin'

With a two-round sort of 17 head and a total time of 105.82 seconds, it was Shelley Fitzgerald,

Yukon, Okla., who took the Futurity Pro Championship aboard Arizona-owner Robb Hanshaw's Playin Cougar (High Brow Cougar x Playin Blues x Playin Stylish), and earned a check worth \$4,440.

"We were kind of coming from behind," Fitzgerald said. "We had to have 10 head to get very competitive at it. I had to have a good partner to make it all work."

DeRoy White, Mound, Okla., has been Fitzgerald's backup in the gate for about three years. "He does a great job at it and communicates well with me," she said. "It's a two-man sport. The teamwork is

kind of like a dance. He's just a great partner."

Playin Cougar, bred and trained by Kathy Daughn, Gonzales, Texas, has been working under Fitzgerald since January. Because the mare had a strong background in cutting, she was a good match for the sorting program, Fitzgerald said.

"The cutting wasn't completely agreeing with her," she said. "The sorting transition was good for her. She was one of the ones that preferred sorting to cutting."

Fitzgerald runs her own Quarter Horse training operation. She said she mainly scopes out cutting horses for the sport, since they seem to have an advantage when starting out.

"I think it's the cattle work," she explained. "It definitely gives you a leg up on things if they've already had all the cow work done. [Playin Cougar] was probably not cowy enough for the cutting, but she had plenty of cow for us. They don't have to have quite as much [to sort]."

Fitzgerald said the mare has a few extra qualities that shine in the show pen. "She's got a really nice mind," she said. "She's extremely talented and athletic."

Fitzgerald will be attending several more ranch sorting events coming up, and will show quite a bit in the fall. As far as her win in Fort Worth, she said she was pleased.

"It was exhilarating," she said. "There were a lot of great competitors. It was really fun to accomplish it with a close friend."

Peek at first place

Riding her newly acquired mare Slide And Peek (Peeka Pep x Prescription Hickory x Doc's Hickory), 16-year-old Samantha Struhall won

the Futurity Non-Pro after a two-round sort of 11 head in 106.23 seconds.

"I was so nervous," she said after her winning ride. "I just didn't want to mess up."

The young Austin, Texas, sorter has been riding most of her life. She's taken a turn at numerous disciplines, including jumping, barrel racing, team penning and now ranch sorting. "The adrenaline rush" is what Struhall likes most about the sport, she said.

With Jared Lesh helping her out in the pen, Struhall rode the mare she's had for about a month to win a Championship check for \$4,840.

"He's just so easy and explains everything so well," she said about Lesh. "He talks you through your run." She's been riding with Lesh, Whitesboro, Texas, and his wife Sarah for three years.

Instead of attending school, Struhall is homeschooled in the morning and takes off in the afternoons to ride horses.

"I just ride all day, every day," she said.

Got 'em all

Joel and Jordan Lesh know a thing or two about ranch sorting. In the Maturity Pro, their talents landed them the Championship with 20 cows sorted in two rounds and a total time of 97.16 seconds. The duo walked away with \$4,650 in prize money.

Joel, 29, was riding Pretty Smart Boy (Pretty Boy Cat x Royally Smart Fancy x Smart Little Lena), bred by Jack Waggoner and Susan Ferguson, Bridgeport, Texas. He had only purchased the gelding a week before the RSNC National Finals. The horse, who boasts an **Equi-Stat** record of more than \$19,000, recently left the cutting arena.

Jordan rode his brother



Samantha Struhall won the Futurity Non-Pro with the help of her partner, Jared Lesh.

— Photo by JimDavisPhoto.com



Jordan Lesh (left) and his brother Joel took the Maturity Pro Championship with a two-round sort of 20 head in 97.16 seconds.

— Photo by JimDavisPhoto.com



Cathy Herrmann and Terry Brooks won the Maturity Non-Pro with a two-round sort of 17 head in 112.13 seconds.

— Photo by JimDavisPhoto.com

Joel's DMAC Spoon Tango (Hes A Peptospoonful x Miss Toot N Shoot x Young Gun), bred by David and Stacie McDavid, Fort Worth, Texas.

"It went pretty smooth. We had one or two cuts that were a little tough," Joel said about the run. "The cows were getting tired. We had to work at it."

The brothers have been to the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) World Show many times for ranch sorting and team penning, and they both get along really well together in the pen.

"We've been doing it for a long time," Jordan said, smiling.

Hooked on sorting

Cathy Herrmann, Syracuse, Kan., and Terry Brooks, Blanchard, Okla., teamed up in the Maturity Non-Pro finals to take home a Championship check worth \$4,650 after a two-round sort of 17 head in 112.13 seconds.

"It's a disease," Herrmann said about the sport. "It's always a little different when you've got more spectators. A lot of times, there's not a lot of people in the stands watching you."

Herrmann rode her husband, Henry's, 2003 gelding Heza Cat Jack (Pretty Boy Cat x Lenas Little Jewel x Smart

Little Lena), bred by Esperanza Ranch, Parks, Ariz.

"He's like a little kid that gets into stuff all the time," she said, smiling. "He's ornery. He knows his job, and he's just been really well trained to do the sorting. He's a strong horse in the gate and just has a lot of go."

Brooks rode Reys Bo Badger (Dual Rey x Pretty Bo Badger x Peppy San Badger), bred by Marshall and Barb Miller, Gettysburg, Pa. Brooks said he hadn't been around horses for many years, and had started riding again about four years ago. It wasn't until

he picked the reins back up that he tried sorting for the first time.

"A friend of mine decided that I ought to come out and try a little ranch sorting, and I did," he said. "Been hooked on it ever since."

The duo has ridden together for about three years, but as loyal as they are to each other, their competitiveness flares up now and again when they compete against one another.

"When it doesn't work out, we just give each other a dirty look and go on," Brooks said with a smile. ★

Sorting Success



Photo by Amber Hodge

With each passing year, the sport of ranch sorting grows. The Ranch Sorting National Championships (RSNC) was established in 2007. Today, it boasts a membership of more than

17,000, and 6,734 teams participated in the RSNC National Finals in Fort Worth, Texas, competing for \$381,863 in class payouts.

The excitement during the five-day competition

was endless. Classes ranged from beginner to expert, and the entries were sky-high. The divisions paid 10 teams deep, and most offered fast-go bonus checks.

A 4-Star Trailer was awarded to World Series winners, and everyone else in the Top 10 went home with cash prizes. Kevin Pearce, Michael Squires and Tony Gibbs walked away with the grand prize trailers.

Lots of saddles were given away in the Sort for the Saddle event. The winners included Pam Haar in the Beginner division, Barbe Ellingboe in the Rookie,

Jessica Burk in the Novice, Shawn Hochhalter in the Amateur, Jared Lesh in the Open and Larry Newport in the Masters.

The No. 8 Handicap drew the most action with 683 teams. The payout for the champions amounted to \$3,785. Taking the victory check were Benji Lindsey and Steven Nichols. The No. 6 Handicap brought in 666 teams, with a winner's purse of \$5,004. Devon Lyles and Colby Spears went home with the Championship.

The Graduated Rookie Sort saw 473 teams, and Barbara Ellingboe and

Vernon Simmons won the top check worth \$2,609. In the No. 10 Handicap, 465 teams competed for the Championship. It was Nicholas Borgia and Ashton Vanderwarf who took home more than \$3,000 in prize money for the win.

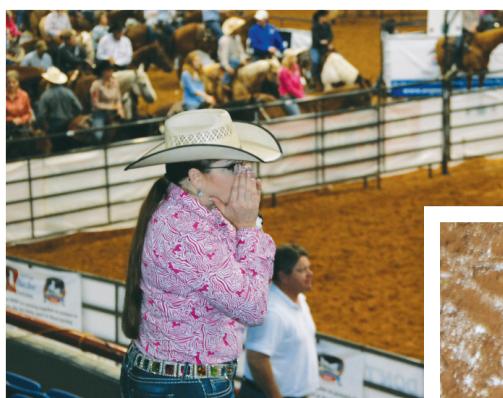
The No. 11 Ranch Hand Handicap saw 435 teams. Brett Hensley and Juanita Rich won the class and took home \$2,758. The only other to have more than 400 teams was the Graduated Beginner Ranch Hand with 412. Pam Haar and Cody Haiar won the class and earned \$1,933.

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Photos by Amber Hodge



Countless teams lined up in the arena to wait for their turn in the pen. There was no waiting in the stands for these competitors.



Renee Free watched with anticipation as her daughter Cydney competed in the Sadie Hawkins class.



An impromptu turtle race ended with the No. 10 turtle speeding across the finish line for first place.



Ali Truman, Kamry Martin and Cody Franklin paused for a quick photo while waiting for the Bareback Sorting to begin.



The riders weren't the only people having fun during the show. These three youngsters, (left to right) Aubrey, Wade and Hunter, met up for a quick play date.



Samantha Struhall was excited after her Futurity Non-Pro victory aboard her mare Slide And Peek.