

A Horse's True Calling

Show-ring success isn't always apparent.

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It takes a very special horse to win the prestigious Carrot Award at the Chisholm Challenge, a horse show for special needs riders from therapeutic riding centers across North Texas. This year it took place Jan. 8-9 during the Fort Worth Stock Show in Fort Worth, Texas. The event attracted about 100 riders from seven centers and included 65 English, western, halter and driving classes. It is one of the largest events of its kind and is approved by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA).

The Carrot Award is presented to one horse that distinguishes itself through its actions for special needs riders, and this year the honor went to a 13-year-old American Paint Horse mare named BR Miss Macho, also known as Honey, owned by Linda Tucker of Stephens, Ark. Tucker thought Honey's competitive days were over because the mare never cut it in the show-ring, but there was still some shine left after all.

"I am a college professor and I often get frustrated by students' lack-luster performances in the classroom," Tucker says. "Honey's unhappiness on the show circuit and her subsequent success as a therapy horse remind me that there is a place for everyone to shine. Not all of us are lucky enough to find that place easily. Sometimes, as was the case with Honey, we have to look a little harder."

Although Tucker thought her mare was through with showing, the therapeutic riding center where Honey was working as a lesson horse—Riding Unlimited based in Ponder, Texas—asked if the palomino overo could be entered in the Chisholm Challenge. Tucker said she felt honored to be asked and was delighted to take part in the event as a handler.

Honey excelled at the show, and in addition to the Carrot Award, she carried her four exhibitors to four first places and Gist Silversmiths trophy belt buckles.

Show judge Pat Burton said that Honey's show-ring success was not what set her apart when he and the other two judges picked the 2008 Carrot Award winner—it was her mental attitude that made her special.

"It really takes a horse that has the right personality and that can handle an emergency without coming apart," Burton says. "Honey was really outstanding in that respect."

Chisholm Challenge co-founder and chairperson Cheril Becker agrees, and she points out why horses like Honey are so special. "Many of these riders are not able to compete in other sports, but this is their thing ... and they're good at it," she says. "Not only are they good at it, some of them walk away with buckles. It's their opportunity to shine."

Eventually, when Honey finishes her work at Riding Unlimited, Tucker says the mare will retire at home because she's definitely earned it.