

Margo Ball



Meeting the challenge.

By Larri Jo Starkey

MARGO BALL HAS NEVER BACKED AWAY FROM A challenge.

At 4, she competed in her first horse show, and by age 9, she was showing American Quarter Horses.

After showing in amateur for two years, Margo gave lessons and trained outside horses during college and while she taught school for 10 years. She started training full time after she quit teaching school and in 1984 received her AQHA judges card.

"I still just really enjoy the challenge (of judging), and the quality has gotten a lot better over the years," she said. "It's the challenge of being a good all-around judge.

"(Becoming a judge) was something that I always had in the back of my mind that I wanted to do. It stems mainly from my youth career. There were always those judges that I showed to as a kid that I admired and respected, and I just knew that was something I wanted to do."

Margo says she was born into a horse family.

"(My first horse) came from Mildred Janowitz, and her name was Crystal Sugar," Margo said. "I called her 'Crystal.' She was the first horse of my very own. I'd had horses that had been in the family, but she was the one that was bought just for me. I remember my first walk-trot class came at age 4, and I won my first check when I was 5."

Margo doesn't have a favorite class.

"I've shown a lot of good halter horses, but I've also had horses that have been Superior in the pleasure and western riding," she said. "Many years ago, I showed horses in reining and working cow horse. As a matter of fact, I was 11 when I showed in my first working cow horse class."

With Margo's desire to share what she knew with others, she was almost destined to become a professional, even though she started as an amateur.

"I started with (giving) a few lessons, and then I started taking a few outside horses," she said. "Ever since I was a kid, I'd had horses to break and ride, so it kind of evolved. I taught for 10 years and all the time I was

teaching, I was giving lessons and taking a few outside horses."

Margo has had a partnership with her two brothers, Wayne and Tom, that has lasted for 35 years.

"Wayne – he shows amateur," she said. "Tom takes care of the breeding and starting of young colts and anything else that needs to be done. We all pitch in."

Margo has judges cards in five organizations besides AQHA: American Paint Horse Association, Palomino Horse Breeders of America, National Snaffle Bit Association, National Reining Horse Association and National Reined Cow Horse Association.

She has judged world championship shows 14 times for all six associations.

"It shocked me when I realized it," she said.

She plans to continue judging, seeing changes in judging as one more challenge to be met.

"Over the years, scoring has changed," she said. "Just using the score sheets and keeping up with all of that – it's a lot. The quality of scored classes such as reining, western riding and trail have improved tremendously over the last 20 years." ■



A Judge's Advice

In preparation for showing, read the rulebook. Know the ideals and rules of the class before you ever step in the ring.

There's a tendency to be trendy in the horse industry. I think it's important to stay consistent and to know the rules and stay consistent with that rulebook.

That advice applies to every class you show in.

An Email sent to Margo on October 28, 2007 regarding the Judges Profile published in the November 2007 American Quarter Horse Journal by Susie Chastain from Montana:

Hello Margo... This morning I sat down with a cup of coffee and opened the November QH Journal (after a long day & night at the Billings Livestock Horse Sale) yesterday and saw your Judges Profile. That article sure did put a smile on my face and what you said was very good and true.

I wish that AQHA had more clean cut, “faithful” and true judges like you. To me you represent AQHA as a judge with much respectable fairness and ideas. And you also change along with the times as do the show horses and breeders.

Versatility is a big deal out our way!! Oh now, don’t forget to say Hi Ya to “TOM” and your “other brother” Wayne. If your ever up Montana way stop by, coffee is always on!!!

*From the range,
Susie Chastain
Big Timber, Montana*