

St. Lazare cowgirl a 'cut' above the crowd

>> Gage Fouillard competes in several High School rodeo events, but has also taken up the sport of cutting completed.

DARRELL NESBITT

Crossroads This Week

The fact that a St. Lazare cowgirl didn't have a "rodeo" horse always came into play in her decision making of joining the ranks of the Manitoba High School Rodeo Association (MHSRA).

However, that all changed when Gage Fouillard put the focus and emphasis of reaching for her rodeo goals on the back of a little cutting horse named Annie.

"I never thought Annie would be the barrel and pole horse she is now," said Fouillard, who began riding as a six-year-old on the back of a Shetland pony named Mikey. "To where I am today as a high school rodeo athlete, I owe everything to Annie."

Involved in her first full year, the Grade 12 student competes in barrels, poles, breakaway roping and the sport of cutting.

Cutting you may ask?

Yes, cutting, an equestrian event in the western riding style where a horse and rider are judged on their ability to separate a single animal away from a cattle herd and keep it away for a short period of time. While not many Manitoba students participate in the event, its Fouillard's favorite and one she has been involved in over four years, all thanks to Greg Frick and Ellen Thompson from Sabre Quarter Horse Ranch in Stockholm, SK. The Saskatchewan horse ranch was the locale where Fouillard started riding competitively at the age of 12.

"LOVE THE RUSH"

"I love the rush it gives me when my horse is working really nice on that perfect cow," said the 17-year-old. "I am also a person who loves a challenge, and what is more challenging than depending on two animals with their

own mind to read each other without guidance of your reins."

Putting a spin on the event, the Birtle Collegiate Institute student had this to say.

"In cutting competition, you and your horse have to work together as a team and show your cattle-handling skills. You only have two and

one-half minutes to complete the task at hand. You are judged partly by the activity of the calf, so the animal is selected by choice, not random. After you have chosen a specific calf to the horse, neither the rider or horse can change calves without a penalty.

The challenge really begins once the cut has been



Aboard her horse Annie, Gage Fouillard is at home in the world of cutting, an event where rider and horse work as a competitive team

completed.

Once the calf is stopped near the center of the arena, you have to drop your hand on the horse's neck and allow the horse freedom to show its cutting skill and cow sense. The horse should match the calf's move-for-move to prevent it from getting back to the herd. A loose rein is one of the keys to a highly marked run. The time limit allows two to three animals to be cut, and the time spent with each animal is left to the competitor's judgment. Performance is evaluated on the basis of several key points, with a score of 70 being average."

FULLY INVOLVED

In the short amount of time of being involved with the MHSRA, Fouillard has had many highlights including being named the Girls Cutting Year End and Finals Champion in 2012/2013.

The daughter of Raquel and Constant Fouillard of St. Lazare is also happy how things have worked out with her horse Annie in terms of success seen over the fall rodeo stops. Results are posted at www.mhsra.ca.

Along with rodeo, she also competes in the Manitoba Cutting Horse Association as well as some shows under the auspices of the Saskatchewan Cutting Horse Association.

She says that two very special registered quarter horses - six-year-old Sabres Playin High aka Annie, and nine-year-old Hot Shot Lucy

aka Lucy - are her travelling buddies and her dream team.

"I'm blessed to be involved in the MHSRA and serving as a student event director alongside my cousin Gabrielle," shared Fouillard. "I'm also blessed to have a mentor like my mom, friends like Greg Frick and Ellen Thompson who have mentored me through all my crazy ideas of what I wanted to do, from the show arena to the cutting pen and now the rodeo arena, and supporters like my cousin, aunt Dolores, and Linette and Nicole Lanski."

ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Facing facts that this is her graduating year, the road to compete in high school rodeo may have been less travelled than other students across Manitoba, it is not to say Fouillard hasn't had a blast at every rodeo she has gone to and will go to this spring.

And this teenager knows with rodeo comes responsibility. Not only from a competitive aspect, but also making sure equipment and tack is fit to go, let alone a horse or two. The roads covered are always a learning experience and completely worth it no matter the distance.

It's something she wished she would've taken part in a long time ago, as in her words it's an association full of great people and in turn a great pastime uplifting the western lifestyle.