

# Ranching Heritage Challenge at the NILE

## Wagonhound horses and cowboys dominate, but other ranches get a piece of the action at the Northern International Livestock Exposition.

By [Larri Jo Starkey](#)

[The American Quarter Horse Journal](#)

October 17, 2014



Matt Koch of Wagonhound Land & Cattle Co. rides Hesa Hickory Cat to win the 4-year-old working ranch horse class October 17 at the Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge at the Northern International Livestock Exposition. (Larri Jo Starkey photo) For more photos from the event, scroll through the slideshow below.

Big Sky Country welcomed ranch horses with a beautiful day October 17, and ranch horses and their riders said howdy right back at the [Northern International Livestock Exposition](#) in Billings, Montana.

The first [Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge](#) in Montana was the last of the year with \$15,000 on the line.

Wagonhound Land & Cattle of Douglas, Wyoming, brought some heavy hitters to the competition, with Matt Koch winning first in open 4-year-old working ranch horse and going 1-2 in 5/6-year-old working ranch horse.

“Hesa Hickory Cat is a horse I showed last year in (reined cow horse) futurities,” Matt said of his 4-year-old winner. “He wasn’t real strong in the reining so we haven’t shown him much, but I won Wyoming’s futurity and Colorado’s cow horse futurity. I haven’t shown him but maybe half a dozen times this year. (Today), I went in there and he was outstanding in the reining, which was a huge shock – usually he boogers somewhere – but he stayed with me and was really good.”

In the working ranch class of AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges, horses and riders work a short reining pattern before boxing a cow on one end and then taking down the fence for two turns. The riders have six minutes to complete all that and follow it up by roping the cow.

“Then they kicked the cow out and he’s usually good with a cow,” Matt said. “We boxed him around and got our two turns and went to the roping. The cow stayed true and honest and we got

him caught, and ‘Hick’ went to the ground.”

Hesa Hickory Cat is a 2010 palomino gelding by WR This Cats Smart and out of Shiney Miss Hickory by Shining Spark. He was bred and is owned by the Wagonhound, an [AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder](#).

Matt didn’t have time to celebrate before he turned around and rode in as the first exhibitor in the 5/6-year-old class. His first ride was the winner on This Cats King, another palomino gelding by WR This Cats Smart and out of a Shining Spark mare.

“I showed him yesterday in open hackamore (at the NILE), and he was good,” Matt said. “We won that, and then we came here today and I jumped on him and went in there and showed him. He’s easy to show. He was decent in the reined work. We were a little long down the fence. We went around the corner, but he went right there and stayed hooked for a big turn for the second turn. We rolled into the roping and he rated off and was good.”

This Cats King and Matt also won the 5/6-year-old class during the [Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge](#) at the Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno, Nevada. Wagonhound’s Matt Kelly won the limited open 4-year-old class on “Louis” in [2013 at the Fort Worth Stock Show](#). But when the horse’s show career is over, he won’t be heading back to the ranch to work cattle. The ranch has a different career in mind for him.

“Our end goal for him is to be the boss’ wife’s personal horse, so we’ll keep hauling him and keep him fit and showing so he’s ready for her when she’s at the ranch,” Matt said.

Matt was also the exhibitor in the 5/6-year-old class on the horse he placed second with, The Smiling Colonel, a 2009 black gelding by Just Plain Colonel and out of HR Smiling Light by Grays Starlight. He was bred and is owned by Wagonhound. The cowboys call him “Snowflake.”

“I’ve got two yellow horses I’ve been hauling all year – two yellows and a black – two colors that are unusual, and I’ve got them,” Matt said.

Wagonhound cowboy Chance Waite won the cowboy class on This Kissin Cat, a 2006 sorrel gelding by WR This Cats Smart and out of Quanahs Kiss by Quanah O Lena. The working ranch horse was bred and is owned by Wagonhound.

“We did the reining pattern they had set for us and going into the cow work, he was good, and the fence work was good,” Chance said. “He did really well considering this is the first time I’ve ever shown him.”

The Ranching Heritage Challenge at the NILE was the first for Chance and for his horse.

“Right before I show, I ride him every day, but he’s a ranch horse, so I’ve got other stuff I need to ride, too,” he said. “It’s a good show. We’ll be back, I’m sure.”

Another cowboy making his challenge debut was Eric Branger, who has been riding Shining

Fever for about a year and a half for AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder Cowan Select Horses of Havre, Montana. The pair won the limited open 4-year-old competition.

“We’ve done a little NRCHA with her and I started roping on her last winter, trying to get her ready for this,” Eric said. “She took to it.”

Shining Fever is a 2010 buckskin mare by Playboys Buck Fever and out of Shining Shiner by Shining Spark. “Gretchen” was bred and is owned by the Cowans.

“I was just trying to be real calm with her,” Eric said. “She’s a strong stopper so I just wanted to make sure her stops were good. And then just get her lead changes correct and the spins nice and easy and make sure I didn’t miss the cow.”

Gretchen is a working girl at home on the ranch.

“We’ve moved cows and wrangled horses on her,” Eric said. “We’ve used her for brandings and things like that, too. She’s a pretty good mare.”

Horse owners C.J. and John Wolfe of Roundup, Montana, bought Weavers Smart Site from AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders Stan and Nancy Weaver of Big Sandy, Montana.

John had intended to ride the mare himself, but after he dislocated an ankle, he sent “Bailey” to Tim Unzicker of Roundup for training. The Wolfes liked what they saw, and entered her in the 5/6-year-old open working ranch class and the open ranch pleasure class, which she won.

“As of next month, she’ll have one year of training,” C.J. said. “Nothing else.”

Weavers Smart Site is a 2009 bay roan mare by Merada Ima Boonsmal and out of SNW Smart In Heaven by Ima Bit Of Heaven.

“It’s been kind of a Cinderella story with her, because she was so far behind (the other horses),” John said. “And she’s come along so good. What you saw out there today is what she is. She’s just so nice.”

John, now recovered from his injury, is itching to show himself.

“Next year, she’s my horse,” he said. “We bought a WR (This Cats Smart colt) from the Wagonhound, and he’s with Tim now. We thought we’d do better in the cow work, but we’ll take this.”