



JESSICA ROBBINS gives Apollo a hug after placing in showmanship *Photo by Deb Kovac*

10-YEAR OLD RECEIVES HORSEMANSHIP AWARD

Submitted by Deb Kovac, Dudley, AL Jessica Robbins, 10, of Oxford, NM

is a special girl. Since both Jesse's brother and sister are participants in the special Olympics, Jess often is a spectator. Her mother and I decided that learning to ride would be a wonderful activity to help Jessica define herself. That special activity where she can shine and have to herself.

Since I no longer have school horses, my 15hh mammoth donkey, Mud Creek Apollo was the only candidate for Jesse's education.

We had two weeks to get ready, and for one of those Jess was going away. The first day, Jessica was terrified of our friendly dog, and I realized she had little animal experience. Jessica had only had five brief lessons with Apollo, one on grooming, two riding and two leading and showmanship. I would expect her to be terrified as she entered the ring for the first time at the Waters Farm Donkey and Mule Fun Show. She wasn't scared, or if she was, she wasn't letting on.

Since I was the show manager, I obviously had little time to prepare her for the class, but she was on top of when her class was and had all the correct gear in hand, waiting for me at Apollo's stall. She did wonderfully well in her first class (showmanship) and took second place.

For the rest of the day she was attentive, aware and even frighteningly in tune with what was going on in the ring and what needed to be done. Not just for herself and Apollo, but also for me as well. She would skip over and grab my ribbons as I came out of the ring. She would bring me my number, correct me if I had the wrong number on (I had another donkey there as well) and let me know if anything was 'un- done' or crooked. In my many years of teaching and helping youth show, I have never had a student, not even the teenagers, be so all together, despite the heat, stress and anxiety. And the amazing part was at the end of the grueling day. She still had enough energy to do cart wheels!



JESSICA ROBBINS and Apollo preparing for a class *Photo courtesy of Conrad Berthold*

Oh, and you should have seen her face when she realized that SHE got to keep her well deserved ribbons. She was eagerly handing them to me for Apollo's collection. I still don't think she's completely understood the Horse Whisperer's Youth Horsemanship award. I think she is just in awe.

Jessica has renewed my enjoyment of youth and equine. Her amazing awareness, and ability to function under stress, removes any hesitation I might have in her showing Apollo again. In fact, I think this girl could be a top notch groom for any show, if she was just a bit taller!

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