

Bringing Up Baby: From Heartache to High Point

By Sue McMurray

Alyssa Miller, 17 and LTH Dee Bar Quincy (Cierra), four, make equitation patterns look easy, trail obstacles a cakewalk and showmanship no sweat. The pair was a formidable team in the north Idaho open shows last summer and won the 2009 MM Training and Consulting Buckle Versatility Award. Alyssa does all of Cierra's training herself, which made the victory sweeter.

But the path to the winner's circle was hard fought. Cierra is Alyssa's second AQHA training project, a fresh start after Alyssa lost her first colt, LTH Triples Dee Bar (Razz), after a severe illness. Having to face such a painful tragedy at the young age of 14 might have turned other youth away from horses altogether. Alyssa got through it and was able to turn adversity into aspiration as she started over with five-month old Cierra. Alyssa and Cierra forged a strong bond from hours of ground training. To most observers, their first ride seemed like their fiftieth when Alyssa easily loped Cierra in a round pen after about 20 minutes of instruction from Marcia Moore.

"Cierra is a 'cheater horse'. In other words, she learns very fast and skips a lot of steps in the training process. That is sometimes bad though, because I will think she knows something that she actually doesn't," said Alyssa.

Cheater or not, Cierra has learned enough to carry Alyssa to the winner's circle several times in the last two years. The two are now preparing for reining competition, and Alyssa hopes to eventually compete in some higher level shows sponsored by the National Reining Horse Association. She also would like to continue training horses in the future.

After graduation from Potlatch High School, Alyssa would like to earn a degree in accounting and obtain her CPA. She plans to attend Washington State University or the University of Texas at Austin.