



PHOTO BY TONYA ORR-PEREZ

Drew Perez, right, is a fourth-generation Hereford breeder. His father, Michael (center), hopes Drew will be able to join his older brother Kyle (left), by returning to the family ranch.

More than a Showman

Herdsmen Award winner, Drew Perez, is following the family tradition.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

For some, being a true herdsman is more than just fitting and showing cattle: it's taking pride in the cattle that never come to town, the cows and calves back on the ranch that make money so the herdsman can spend it showing.

The Herdsman Award presented at the 2008 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Kansas City went to one of those herdsman, Drew Perez of Nara Visa, N.M. The hard-working fourth generation Hereford breeder and son of Michael and Connie Perez, Drew grew up on his family's ranch in northeastern New Mexico, C&M Herefords.

He says, "I like seeing good cows and calves in the pasture, giving people tours of the ranch and showing them the calf crop and pasture. I almost like that more than showing."

Family tradition

But that's not to say he doesn't enjoy showing; it's certainly in his blood. Drew's father won fifth place in showmanship at the horned junior nationals when he was a youth, and Drew's older brother, Kyle, won senior showmanship and received the Herdsman Award at JNHE as well.

In fact, Drew got his first taste of showing success before he was even old enough to show. It was at the 1994 junior expo when Kyle showed a heifer Drew had raised. The heifer was named the division winner, and Drew says, "I put the buckle on as soon as he got out of the ring."

That was all the encouragement Drew needed to follow in his father's and brother's footsteps. As soon as he was old enough, he and Kyle traveled the country showing Herefords.

Showing cattle is just one part of the family business. The Perez family manages their registered and commercial Herefords on the ranch leased from Connie's parents, Don and Marry Helen Kuper. Drew explains they sell 25-30 bulls a year as well as a few show heifers.

Dedication

Showing cattle isn't the only thing at which Drew has worked hard and been successful. In fact, it may be easier to name the things Drew isn't involved in than what he is.

As a high school student at nearby Logan, N.M., Drew participated in everything from 4-H and FFA, to student council and National Honor Society, to varsity basketball, football, track and baseball. As if that wasn't enough, he also hauled to high school rodeos and many cattle shows, as well as volunteering in community and church activities. The amazing thing about Drew is he doesn't just participate in all of these activities; he excels at each. His list of accomplishments within these organizations is several pages long.

One accomplishment Drew's parents are most proud of is his winning streak at the New Mexico State Fair. Drew won every division of showmanship offered there, not once but twice. And, each contestant is only allowed to win each division twice, at which point he is required to sit out of the competition until he is eligible for the next division. According to Connie, Drew is the only person to have ever won the novice, junior and senior showmanship twice each.

Most recently Drew graduated from Butler County Community College, El Dorado, Kan., where he excelled in the classroom and on the livestock judging team. His team won national champion titles at the North American International contest, the National Western Stock Show contest and the Houston Livestock Show. Because of his success, he was named to the National Junior All-American Livestock Judging Team. While attending all of these judging contests, he didn't let his grades slip either; Drew was named to the president's honor roll.

When asked how he works it all in, Drew shrugs as though it's no big deal. After so many years of dedication to all he is involved in, it has become second



Drew is an accomplished showman, he placed fifth in senior showmanship at the 2008 JNHE. He has also won New Mexico State Fair showmanship contests six times.

nature to him. Kyle says it's because they both, "have the passion to be the best, we don't settle for second, we strive to win at everything we do."

High expectations

Drew's mother, Connie, says she and his father, Michael, have set high expectations for both of their sons and taught them to do everything 100% or not at all. She says for Drew to have time for everything he has had to learn good time management skills, and sometimes that means staying in late at night and working when other kids are out having fun.

Connie says her sons' work ethic has been instilled in them since they were youngsters. Because she works as a teacher, and Drew's father, Michael, has to look after things on the ranch, Kyle and Drew have been going to shows by themselves for years. Kyle says, "They trust us enough to take care of business when we come to a show; they don't have to chaperone us because they know we want to do it."

Sheila Jensen, Courtland, Kan., says Drew deserves the Herdsman Award because he and his brother do all their own work. "They do it all themselves, whether they have two head or 10. They break, clip and wash." She adds, "Drew is always willing to help anyone, and he is easy-going and pleasant. He's very even-tempered, not hotheaded, when things go wrong. And he is very gentlemanly and polite."

Drew and Kyle have always worked their cattle at home by themselves as well. Connie says, "They take care of their cattle from ground zero; they are hands-on with everything from choosing which heifers to show to feeding and grooming them." She adds, "Drew is up at 5:30 every morning; he rinses his cattle morning and night by himself."

Making each other better

Because Drew is participating in many of the same activities Kyle excelled in, Kyle says at times it's been hard handing over the reins. But, Connie says, "When it came Drew's time, Kyle stepped aside. That's the reason Drew learned, because Kyle made Drew do it on his own."

Drew says, "He's always left big footprints for me, and I've always looked up to him and tried to

overachieve what he did, which is pretty hard."

Kyle responds, saying, "I'm proud that he is successful; it means all those butt-chewings paid off. He's better than I was because he had a good teacher."

Despite these kind words, the young men don't go without the occasional disagreement. Connie says it's been hard at times for Drew to follow in Kyle's footsteps, but the boys are never jealous of each other. She says the two sons have very different personalities, so, "By working together they've made each other better."

The Perez ranch is still operated the cowboy way, meaning a lot of the working together is done on horseback. In that environment, being a herdsman means also being a horseman. Kyle says horsemanship is something Drew doesn't lack. Drew starts colts for use on the ranch as well as participates in rodeo events. They still drag their calves to the fire every spring to brand them the traditional way, which is often a true test of a horseman's skill.

Kyle says, "Drew is more impressive in the branding pen than anything else."

Kyle has married and returned to work on the ranch, something Drew would also like to do someday. In fact, in some ways, Drew has followed Kyle's path exactly, at least up until this point. Both brothers judged at Butler County, but now Drew will continue his education at Texas Tech University, whereas Kyle attended Kansas State.

Drew says he chose Texas Tech so he could rodeo as well as judge livestock and because it's closer to home. Kyle supports his decision and is looking forward to Drew's help when he visits, which will likely be often considering the two will continue showing throughout the year. The pair travel to many national shows to exhibit their cattle, from Louisville to Denver and Kansas City to Ft. Worth.

Also, Drew has one more JNHE to compete in before his youth career is over. After winning three scholarships, placing fifth in senior showmanship, showing two class-winning heifers and



Kyle congratulates Drew after he receives his award. Kyle and Drew are the only brothers to have both won the Herdsman Award.

being named Herdsman, it may be hard to top this year's JNHE. When asked about that, Kyle is quick to respond that they've still got to win the heifer show, and Drew says he would still like to win showmanship.

But again, while Drew is proud of his success in the showing, he believes the ranch is where the work begins, raising and preparing cattle for the showing. And in true herdsman style, Drew's father, Michael, believes Drew is more than capable of handling any ranch task and has been since he was a youngster.

Michael tells a story illustrating just that. He says when Drew was about 9 years old, Kyle was gone to an FFA activity and he, Michael, had gone to Amarillo, Texas, on an errand. Drew was home when he found a heifer calving. Michael says he called the neighbor, but it was a while before anyone could come to help. Drew simply told his mother, I've seen this done a hundred times, and headed outside. By the time the neighbor arrived to help, Drew had the heifer in the chute, had used a bucket of water and disinfectant, had the calf on the ground and was tickling the calf's nose with a twig to make him sneeze.

Michael tells this story with a sense of pride because he says he's worked hard to teach his sons responsibility at an early age. He says he didn't cut his children any slack at all and is very proud to have both of his sons win the Herdsman Award. He says, "Especially because today so many parents do all the work, or they hire fitters, I take a lot of pride in my kids' winning the Herdsman Award. It's as important to me as winning the whole heifer show." **HW**