



Pictured at the 2018 National Western Stock Show (l to r) are Eric Eldridge, 2018 Hereford Herdsman of the Year; Abigail Pitstick, 2017-18 National Hereford Queen; and Shane Bedwell, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement.

step into the showing at Denver — the peak of the year. While show day is exciting, it's the other 364 days of the year that create champions — the hard work day-in and day-out it takes to get the cattle to that point. From breeding to calving to feeding out and fitting for the show, there is a lot more to this journey than stepping into the ring. In fact, those long hours year-round are where the 2018 Hereford Herdsman of the Year, Eric Eldridge, Bruneau, Idaho, finds the most joy.

Hundreds gathered on the Stadium floor Jan. 13 before the selection of the polled Hereford grand champion female in great anticipation — awaiting not only the announcement of the winning female but also the announcement of the Hereford Herdsman of the Year. The excitement on Eldridge's face upon the announcement said it all.

Eldridge was selected as Herdsman of the Year by his peers, other Hereford herdsman and breeders.

"For that many people to pick me out of all the guys in the barn is a pretty special feeling," he says. "For all the guys like me that do this day-in and day-out, it is a dream to be recognized as the Hereford Herdsman in Denver. It is a pretty amazing feeling."

Early start

Eldridge grew up on a commercial cattle operation and exhibited all species of livestock throughout his childhood in Quartz Valley, Calif. He credits his early love for the industry

Beyond the Showbarn

Eric Eldridge, Bruneau, Idaho, is named Hereford Herdsman of the Year.

by *Kayla Jennings*

The rich history and shared passion amongst thousands is overwhelming for an attendee at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver. Walking through the Yards in the crisp air, hearing the thousands of cattle being prepared to show is addicting for many. If the wood

used to build the Yards more than 100 years ago could talk, it would be intriguing to pull up a chair to listen.

The rich history runs deep for all cattlemen, but Denver holds a special place for Hereford breeders — young and old. All the work at home has culminated in the moment their cattle



Eldridge says he would not be where he is today if it weren't for the support of his family and friends. Pictured (l to r) are: Wade Henderson; Sean Canaan; Emilio Castillo; Jacob Embry; Jamie Michelson; Don Yoesel; Maddee Moore; Eric Thomas; Eric Eldridge; Bill Hartnell; Erin Eldridge; Kyle, Piper and Bobby Jean Colyer; Will Gibson; Kelsey Stimpson; George Sprague; Adam Eldridge; Katie Colyer; and Brett Sheehan.

to his parents for providing the environment for his passion to grow in the livestock industry.

“From a very young age I have always loved cattle and all animals for that matter,” he says. “People say I have a way with them.”

Upon high school graduation, Eldridge followed that passion by working for Don Cardey for six years, showing cattle across the western United States. Eldridge fondly remembers the first show they went to in Del Mar, Calif. They exhibited 72 head and that was not uncommon for Cardey.

“I learned how to take care of cattle going down the road,” Eldridge says. “He taught me the things that, to me, are the truly important things you need to know about how to run a cow-calf operation. He is not going to teach you how to fit one up, but in terms of teaching you how to road cattle, he has been a huge part of my career.”

In fact, it was while he was showing cattle with Cardey at the Oregon State Fair that Eldridge met his wife, Erin. She shares his same passion for the cattle industry, traveling to many cattle shows in her time. “She has always been my biggest supporter,” he notes. “It means the world to me that she was able to be there when I received the herdsman award. I could not have accomplished this without her love and support.”

Eldridge says that after gaining valuable experience with Cardey, he and Erin went into the custom fitting business with her family for 12 years — focusing mainly on Hereford show cattle. One of their long-time clients was Cox Herefords, Jefferson, Ore. During that time, they welcomed three kids into the family. They have 15-year-old twins, Abby and Emma, and a 10-year-old son, Cade. Eldridge says all the work they did custom fitting would not have been possible without his late mother-in-law, Paulette Hartnell.

“She was who made it possible for my wife and I to go to all these shows for all those years,” he says. “She was an amazing grandmother to our three kids, and she took care of them while we were gone.”

Those years on the road lead Eldridge to growing, learning and

making more connections within the industry. He says he feels blessed to have worked with individuals like Randy Beeman and Scott Downing — past Hereford Herdsmen. He also notes Brad and Dawn Gohr, Gohr Angus and Herefords, Madras, Ore., as integral individuals to his career. “I helped them for a lot of years,” he notes. “They gave me a lot of opportunities to learn a variety of skills. That is where I first got around to flushing cattle.”

All the experience culminated to Eldridge landing a job with Colyer Herefords, Bruneau, Idaho, five years ago.

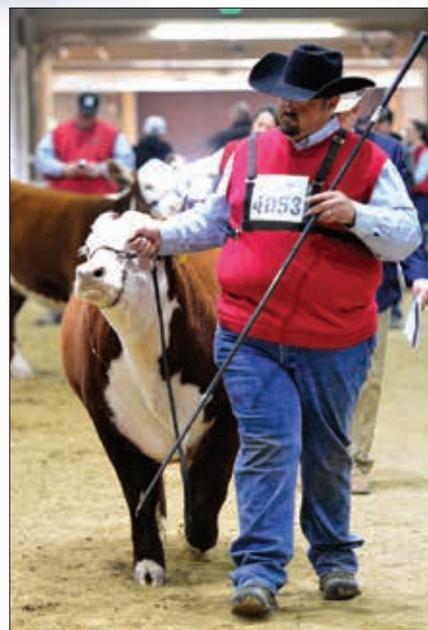
Beyond the 8 to 5

At Colyer’s, Eldridge is responsible for caring for the show cattle, traveling to all national shows, checking cows and calves in the pastures each day and more. Kyle Colyer, Eldridge’s supervisor, described him as an extremely reliable employee with a versatile skillset that makes him a perfect candidate for this honor.

“Eric is a true herdsman all year round,” Colyer says. “He is a multi-dimensional employee, who can do everything from breeding to fitting and in between. That is what it is all about.”

The “in between” is the favorite part of the job for Eldridge. “I can’t wait to

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Denver has held many fond memories for Eldridge and his crew.



Eldridge was surrounded by friends and family during the announcement at Denver.



Eldridge has had a passion for cattle since childhood.



Eldridge says the work at home is the critical for any success on the road.

see the calves that will be the next ones coming for next year,” he says. “I look forward to going outside everyday to work with cattle.”

Eldridge says his position is unique because he is not in the show barn every day. “That is what I love so much about my position with Colyer’s,” he says. “It is not a typical position where you are in the show barn 24/7. My job is not just to work on show cattle, but it is also AI-ing cows, helping calving and herd health. I enjoy that it is not the same thing day-in and day-out.”

To Eldridge, all the work outside the showbarn is what truly defines a herdsman. He says a herdsman is truly passionate about the cattle and the outfit he works for. “He is there

throughout the entire process,” Eric explains. “He is not just washing and clipping cattle. He has the ability to take care of the cattle, doing all the stuff you don’t see at the show necessarily. There is a lot that happens before show day. To me, it is all those things leading up to show day.”

In his time in Bruneau, Eldridge says his skills in these areas have only grown, and he feels very fortunate to work with some of the best cattle in the industry every day for a family that has dedicated their lives to promoting the Hereford breed. He credits much of his newfound knowledge to Guy and Kyle Colyer. “I learn new things everyday,” he notes. “They are some of the best cattlemen I know, and that is where it all starts. You have got to be able to run those cattle, or what we do at the shows is not possible.”

For young guys just starting in the business, Eldridge cannot stress enough the value of hard work. He says it is important to remember to take every opportunity available and to put in the time to work to the top.

The pinnacle

Reflecting on his many years in the industry, Eldridge recalls several high points. Sifting to the top is having champion polled bull at Ft. Worth in 2016 and 2017 back-to-back with Black Hawk Down, receiving the Herdsman award this year and showing cattle with his family. He notes a specific year at Shorthorn junior nationals when his

daughter, Emma, won her class with a pair they had raised, and Abby made the callback in showmanship.

Eldridge names several successes his team has had over the years in Reno, Denver and Ft. Worth. “It has been a neat experience,” he says. “To win the Herdsman award for me is overwhelming. To have your peers think that much of the job you do is pretty humbling. It is one of those things that most guys that do what I do dream for. To win the Hereford Herdsman was always a big deal to me.” In fact, his wife’s family raised Herefords in the ’50s, so that connection makes this honor even more special.

Looking forward, he says one of his main goals is to manage a bull or female to the level of winning all three major shows where they exhibit — Reno, Denver and Ft. Worth. Eldridge does point out that what he has been able to accomplish thus far and what he will accomplish in the future would not be possible without the team he works with. He notes the Colyers now have three individuals on their crew who have been named the Hereford Herdsman — Kyle Colyer, Don Yoesel and himself.

“The reality of it is that I could not do it without my team,” he explains. “The group of guys and gals I get to work with are amazing.”

Beyond the support of his work team, Eldridge says he cannot put into words how much he appreciates his team at home — his family. “There are times when my job is stressful, and they are very supportive of me and my job,” he says. “I just want them to know how much I appreciate them and all they do for me. I couldn’t ask for better people in my corner.”

Throughout their time showing cattle as a family, Eldridge says Bob and Peggy Potter, Winton, Calif., have been a huge piece. Bob sent cattle with Eldridge for more than a decade, and they became very close. In January of this year, Bob lost his battle with lymphoma, and Eldridge would like to dedicate the Hereford Herdsman award to Bob and his family for the influence they have had on his life. **HW**



Eldridge has been working with the Colyer family for the last five years and enjoys the versatility in his position.