

Enjoying Her Ride

2021 Hereford Herdsman Alyssa Copeland rides for the breed and the brand.

by *Diane Meyer*



Pictured at the inaugural Cattlemen's Congress is the 2021 Hereford Herdsman Alyssa Copeland and her husband, Matt.

She would not take no for an answer. Finally, a hesitant Scott Woolfolk hired the insistent 12-year-old neighbor as a farmhand at Woolfolk Farms in Jackson, Tenn. Her first day on the job, Alyssa Copeland was on a side-by-side spraying fences. Scott hoped she would make it an hour.

"She sprayed fences for about 12 hours straight that day," Woolfolk says. "That was her."

In a few years she could do it all, watching and taking note of every detail. She became part of the family, mentoring Scott's kids on the farm and in the showing. Sixteen years later, Scott walked Alyssa down the aisle at her wedding.

"I think the most unique thing about her is she has gotten to where she has at a young age, and she didn't start out with any kind of agricultural background," Scott says.

For Alyssa, her key to success has always been, "Be loyal to a fault, be honest and hardworking."

Fortune in a mason jar

Growing up in Jackson, Tenn., Alyssa had no experience with cattle until her family moved across the road from an Angus farm. One summer day at church, an 8-year-old Alyssa asked the neighbor if she could help out at his farm. The now 28-year-old recalls, "He told my mom, 'Oh, this will last 'til Christmas and she'll be over it.'"

The student-by-day and farmer-by-night learned about genetics and cattle, often running a cotton module builder late into the night. A few years later she began working for the Woolfolks, forever solidifying her love of Herefords and the showing.

Under their mentorship, Alyssa acquired enough knowledge to win the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) proficiency award in forage production. The future farmer, 4-Her and livestock judge ventured to Tennessee Tech University, continued those activities at the collegiate level and was elected Tennessee State FFA Vice President in 2012.

On top of classes and three jobs to put herself through college, Alyssa worked at the university farm and was influential in adding the first Hereford genetics to the school's embryo transfer program.



Alyssa's list of mentors en route to Hereford Herdsman is long, and she is especially grateful to the Copeland family for their support. "The people who helped me get here made it mean so much to me," she says. Pictured (l to r) are three generations: Pat and Cliff, Barbara and Clifford and Matt and Alyssa Copeland.

“Where I went to college was Angus country, but I made sure they all knew I was a Hereford kid,” she grins.

One fateful day, the soon-to-be graduate headed home to tell the Woolfolks about a job she had accepted. Scott had other ideas. “Do you want to go to New Mexico for three months?” he asked. In less than five hours, the 22-year-old decided to turn down an interim Extension job and move across the country.

Sit tall in the saddle

Culture shock aside, Alyssa found herself at home at Copeland & Sons Herefords LLC in Nara Visa, N.M., where it is “only 30 minutes away from a drought,” as the old-timers say. Instead of an eight-head string to prep for Tennessee shows, Alyssa was given 100 sale calves to wash and clip, plus a prediction from her now husband, Matt Copeland, “By the time sale season is over, you’re going to know whether you love it or hate it.”

Alyssa did what she does best — worked with a prove-she-can mentality.

“She’s a true cowman’s cowman, whether it’s everyday ranch work or in the showring,” Matt says. “She does it all at a level that isn’t seen often. She gets cattle presented to the best of their ability in a way that is second-to-none.” Realizing her talents, Matt instructed her to clip a heifer’s show-side, front leg at her first National Western Stock Show (NWSS) with the Copeland crew.

Ready or not, Alyssa welcomed every task thrown her way. “You don’t get better by sitting back and letting someone else do it,” she points out. In her experience, an open mind and willingness to learn from different people was the best way to figure what worked for her.

At the “no-nonsense, real-world” Copeland ranch established in 1943, she is involved in all aspects of running a 650-head, five-breed cow herd, from managing breeding programs to checking pastures.

“That’s the fun part — seeing how those calves come out and grow the direction you want your herd to go,” she says. “I think it’s really important for a herdsman to see the business management and production side of things.”



Alyssa is admired by her peers for her success in the cattle industry even though she was not raised on a farm. “You’ve got to build a reputation and start from the bottom,” she reflects. “It doesn’t happen overnight.”

With Alyssa’s help, Copeland & Sons has raised or sold 15 national supreme, grand and reserve grand champions in the last five years. In particular, her favorite memory is winning premier breeder at the 2018 NWSS in Denver and at the Fort Worth Stock Show (FWSS) a few weeks later. That memorable year also happened to be Copeland & Sons 75th anniversary.

Through all the victories, she never stopped learning or working.

“I’m a firm believer everything happens for a reason. There’s nothing that is just luck. It’s hard work,” the showman shares. “The right people are going to watch you, whether you know it or not.”

continued on page 66...



Alyssa cherishes the memories made showing with close family friends, like being part of exhibiting the grand champion horned female at the 2019 FWSS with Ty and Kaleigh Krebs. Pictured is JCS Miss Buttercup 7296, exhibited by Kynsleigh and Sage Krebs, at the FWSS dedicated to Gary and Kathy Buchholz.

Turns out, the right people were watching. Between the selection of the horned and polled champion Hereford females at the inaugural 2021 Cattlemen's Congress in Oklahoma City, the show paused for the announcement of the Hereford Herdsman of the Year.

Quoting Gary Buchholz of GKB Cattle, Waxahachie, Texas, the announcer read, "It takes work ethic. It has to be in your heart. It takes willpower, no matter the good times or bad times, to present your cattle to the best of your ability. ... It's not a man's world anymore. She has a work ethic like I've never seen among young women today. She does it right and with pride."

At that moment, the crowd and a speechless Alyssa realized the outcome of the votes cast by her fellow exhibitors.

"It's really humbling for fellow breeders and past Hereford herdsman to put me on the list and for breeders to vote for me," the 2021 Hereford Herdsman says. "The people who helped me get here make this mean so much more to me."

Where the trail meets the sky

The Herdsman honor follows a milestone year for the Copelands. Coming off a supreme champion victory at the Arizona National Livestock Show in December 2019, Alyssa and Matt got engaged in January 2020 and married in November. Her Herdsman title meant just as much to Matt, who accomplished the same feat in 2011. In fact, Matt and Alyssa join the ranks of only one other couple to win the Herdsman award separately.

"Our hearts are in Hereford, and that's our home," Alyssa says. "There's so much tradition and history within the Hereford breed and to join that list of distinguished individuals is a dream come true."

Her list of people to thank in making this dream a reality is long: her parents, the

Woolfolks, the Buchholzes, the Krebs and Dunklau families of Nebraska, countless mentors in Tennessee and Billy Donnell — her neighbor who helped her learn about cattle and farming those many years ago. Above all, she is grateful to her New Mexico family: Matt, father- and mother-in-law, Cliff and Pat, and Cliff's parents, Clifford and Barbara Copeland.

To her many mentors and friends who have helped along the way, Alyssa says, "When you're doing what you love with the people you love and where you love being, it's not a job; it's a passion."

Her mindset parallels a quote from one of the Copeland family's idols, John Wayne, who said, "A goal, a love and a dream give you total control over your body and your life."

With her name etched in the Hereford history books, the cattlegirl looks to the future. She and Matt are inspired working with the next generation of cattlemen, hoping to motivate them to stay involved in the industry. She also admires established ranches that have stayed at the forefront of the Hereford breed.

"I think one thing that sets the Hereford breed apart is the good cowmen involved who see a future in them," she says. "They know what we've come from and they know where we're going. Those breeders are working hard to keep us in the right direction and keep our junior programs alive and keep people involved."

Undoubtedly, the Hereford breed will keep moving forward, with its herdsman leading the way. As for Alyssa, she's going to "keep riding for the brand" and living by her favorite Chris LeDoux mantra, "Sit tall in the saddle, hold your head up high; keep your eyes fixed where the trail meets the sky; and live like you ain't afraid to die; and don't be scared, just enjoy your ride." **HW**



Alyssa recommends, "If you take everything in from the outside, watch people and surround yourself with the right people, you're going in the right direction. Having an outside perspective helped me succeed. When you don't grow up in it, you don't have one set way of doing things."