

# DARLING Catichi

*Phenomenal is the word that best  
describes the 2012 Bank of America  
high-point junior horse.*

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**By Jennifer K. Hancock**

SOME PEOPLE IN THE HORSE INDUSTRY MIGHT SAY THAT IT TAKES a miracle to win a year-end award and that the stars have to align just right. Darling Catichi's connections have proof in a walking little sorrel phenomenon. It's really no wonder that the word "phenomenal" comes up a lot in conversations about the now 6-year-old mare.

"She's just a phenomenal individual," says AQHA Professional Horseman Chris Anderson of Merino, Colorado, who trains "Darling" for Linnea and Herman Zueck of Golden, Colorado.

Part of sire Cat Ichi's freshman foal crop, the mare is out of the Colonel Freckles mare Colonels Darling. A son of High Brow Cat, Cat Ichi himself has nearly \$240,000 in National Cutting Horse Association earnings. He won the 2004 NCHA Derby and was reserve in the 2004 NCHA Super Stakes. He is listed as the 2009 AQHA leading NCHA freshman sire. His progeny have won more than \$1.8 million in NCHA competition, \$8,000 in National Reined Cow Horse Association competition and nearly \$12,000 in AQHA World Show competition.

The Zuecks took a chance on Darling, who was in training to be a cutter when they purchased her in the spring of her 3-year-old year. Chris had just sold some horses for the Zuecks, and they were in the market for "a nice one."

"A friend told me that this mare might be for sale," Chris says. "I tried her and really liked her. Day 1, that mare just wanted to try. It didn't matter what you were doing, she just wanted to try. It doesn't matter if you are practicing on her or showing her, that mare's always giving you 110 percent."

Chris capitalized on the small mare's cutting training and introduced her to working cow horse, but his specialty is roping so it wasn't long before he was swinging a rope off her.

"We started heeling on her late that fall, and she wanted to be phenomenal in the roping," Chris says.

Phenomenal. See a pattern?

"As a 4-year-old, we continued to heel on her, and I started roping calves on her, and she was outstanding," Chris says. "We qualified her for the (AQHA) World (Championship) Show her 4-year-old year in heeling and tie-down roping. She was still just a touch green as a 4-year-old in the tie-down so we didn't show her at the World Show. But we showed her in heeling."

Enter AQHA Professional Horseman J.D. Yates, who is no stranger to the all-around title.

"J.D. is a good friend, and we were practicing together at the World Show," Chris says. "J.D. said, 'You know if you picked your spots with that mare, you could head on her.' When we came home, I started working on her in heading. All of a sudden, we were heading. We went to Denver. I



Jay Lyn Wadhams  
and Darling Catichi

caught my finger dallying in Denver and hurt my finger. J.D. showed her the last day in Denver, and he told me, 'That's a hell of a mare.'

And the phenom was just getting started. When Chris and Darling left the horse show at Denver, they had racked up more than 40 points.

"From what I won in Denver and then the next show (the Black Hills Stock Show), we had more than 80 points," Chris says. "I asked J.D., 'Do you think I could win that all-around deal on that mare?'"

"When I told him how many points we had, he said, 'You gotta hell of a chance, but if you're going to do it, you better keep going.'"

So go they did. With the blessing of Herman and Linnea, Chris and Darling hit the road, often with fellow Coloradoan and J.D.'s cousin Jay Wadhams, who is also an AQHA Professional Horseman.

"It wasn't necessarily a goal to start with," Chris explains.

The goal for 2012 was actually to get Darling Catichi qualified for the World Show.

"When we left Denver, she was qualified in all three events," he continues. "We got her qualified in one show."

When you reach one goal – set the bar a bit higher.

"Jay Wadhams showed her quite a bit at some of the big

horse shows," Chris says. "She just fit Jay phenomenally. I showed her in heading and (tie-down) roping, and Jay showed her in heeling. He won the (All American Quarter Horse) Congress on her in heeling."

In addition to the Congress win, she also finished fifth at the World Show in junior heeling and was second at the Oklahoma Redbud Spectacular in junior heeling. She also won the heading and tie-down futurities at the Black Hills Stock Show and was the champion in the Intermediate heading at Battle in the Saddle. She finished at the top of the year-end standings in junior heading and junior heeling, and she was third in the year-end standings for junior tie-down. She was the all-around junior high-point horse and was second in the overall all-around standings. Overall, when age is not considered, she also was third in the year-end standings in tie-down roping, third in heading and second in heeling.

Herman credits the horse and her trainer.

"Chris did an outstanding job with this mare," Herman says. "Chris will go rope a steer on her and come back and hand her to Linnea. When Linnea gets on her, she walks away like she's 18 years old and been doing it all her life. She can change her personality from being a performance horse to just being a horse. It's just amazing."

"We met Chris when he was a student at the Colorado School

of Mines,” he adds. “He has a great personality and has a great work ethic. Chris has done a wonderful job for us. Chris and Darling surprised us. They didn’t surprise themselves because they knew what they were doing, but they surprised us.”

Of course, Chris always brags on the horse.

“She would do whatever anybody wanted her to do,” Chris says. “If the cutters would have kept her, she would have been a great cutter; if we would have taken her down the road as a cow horse, she would have been a great cow horse; she would have been a great mare no matter where she was. She’s just a phenomenal individual. It just so happens that Herman and Linnea bought her, and she ended up with a roping trainer so now she’s a great rope horse.”

Bred by Thomas and Suzanne Gowan of San Antonio, Darling Catichi has amassed 377.5 points. She has earned 231 points in heeling, 105.5 points in heading, 33 points in tie-down roping, seven points in performance halter, five points in barrel racing and three points in pole bending.

“I messed around and ran some barrels on her at home because I needed something else to fulfill the all-around,” Chris says. “When I was a kid growing up, I ran barrels and poles at all the 4-H events, so I had a pretty good understanding of what I was doing. The way she is bred, she has phenomenal speed.”

“She wanted to be pretty good at home so I just started paying attention to when the barrel entries were pretty good,” he explains. “When we were in Iowa, they had a bunch of barrel racers show up, so I entered. And sure enough, we earned some points. So we entered the next day. And we won some more. I wasn’t sure that I had the right points because this was the first time that we had tried to win this award. Someone told me that we didn’t have the right points so I entered the pole bending because I thought we needed more points. But it turned out we didn’t need any more, but we got them.”

As well as the mare adapts to new challenges, Herman and Linnea are considering using her in Versatility Ranch Horse competition.

“Linnea and I show a little bit,” Herman says, “so Linnea may take her and show her. Chris is going to show her in cow horse this year and see how she does. We’ll probably end up keeping her and raising some colts out of her. We think she has a lot of potential.”

So while most of Darling’s story sounds like a typical talented American Quarter Horse wins year-end award story, there is a twist. Chris and Darling were returning home from Battle in the Saddle with another of the Zuecks’ horses, and when they topped a hill about 20 miles from home, the trio encountered some wayward cattle.

“He ended up destroying his truck, destroying his trailer,” Herman recalls. “Darling was in the trailer along with another one of our horses. When Chris got it sorted out and got out of the truck, the truck was in one bar ditch and the trailer was in the other.”

Miraculously, Chris was able to get the end gate open and remove the horses from the wreckage.

“The only part of the truck and trailer that wasn’t hurt was where he was sitting and where the horses were,” Herman says. “He unloaded them, and they had a few nicks and cuts on them, but nothing that required a vet. Chris’ girlfriend brought another truck and trailer, and Darling jumped right in and the other horse jumped right in behind her. It was amazing that Chris didn’t get hurt, No. 1, and the horses didn’t get hurt, No. 2.”

Phenomenal indeed. ■

*Jennifer K. Hancock is a special contributor to The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to [aqhajrnl@aqha.org](mailto:aqhajrnl@aqha.org).*



**Darling Catichi's entourage: Bill and Diana Anderson, Herman and Linnea Zueck, Jay Lyn Wadhams, Darling Catichi, Chris Anderson, Sarah Boon, Dawn Anderson and Matt Madsen**

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