

Guineas winner a determined young woman

By JIM ALGIE
Sun Times staff

DOBBINTON — It's more than a month since a judge at the Royal Winter Fair slapped the velvety haunch of Rosanne Calhoun's steer, Buckwheat, winner of this year's Queen's Guineas.

She still has trouble believing it. But there are reminders.

A large color photograph hangs on the wall of her mother's kitchen. The photo shows Calhoun and Buckwheat — looking groomed to within an inch of his life — Ontario Agriculture Minister Jack Riddell, the judges and winter fair officials.

And Elderslie Township council has presented Calhoun with an engraved serving tray to remind her that she really did win the top prize Ontario 4-H clubs can offer. Bruce County women, both members of the Paisley club, have taken the guineas two years running.

"We're nobodies," Calhoun said one afternoon at the kitchen table with continuing amazement in her voice. She said it twice, for emphasis.

"I mean, we're nobodies." What the 20-year-old accounting student really meant is that she and her parents, Earl and Pat Calhoun, run a relatively straightforward, commercial beef feedlot on 100 hectares of land on the 10th Concession of Elderslie Township.

The surprise is that ordinary folk can take away such a prize from the highbrow competition of the Royal. The Queen's Guineas was once thought to be the preserve of families active in purebred cattle breeding with a long, show-ring history.

For a time, it seemed the property of Wellington County's Hasson family and the Earlys of Middlesex. But coming on the heels of Margie Fenner's 1986 win, Calhoun's guineas victory makes it look like a new tradition has begun.

Both Calhoun and Fenner used Hasson-bred, Angus-Chianina steers. But the secret of their back-to-back wins is likely that Fenner and Calhoun are just two very determined young women.

The Queen's Guineas, named for Queen Victoria, is "the ultimate" in 4-H beef calf club competition. Winning takes heavy doses of everything: cattle judgment, management, luck, tender care and plain hard work.

The winner not only gets a generous cash prize and considerable distinction at the show, she also

Meat industry buyers compete for the privilege of owning the Queen's Guineas steer. This year, buyers for the Toronto retail food chain Knob Hill Farms Ltd. paid a record \$20 a pound for Calhoun's steer.

The carcass was donated to the Hospital For Sick Children.

That price works out to \$24,400, about 20 times what the animal would have brought at the Ontario Stockyards last November. It's a prize worth some work.

"It has to be a good steer to start," Calhoun said. But winning, "depends on the time that you put forth."

Now in her final year at Georgian College in Owen Sound, Calhoun walked Buckwheat two kilometres a day after classes last winter and through the summer to keep him in top physical condition.

Daily for eight months, she spent as much as two hours grooming his dark coat, brushing up his hair, encouraging it to grow and soften so she'd have something to work with come show day.

"Hair makes an animal," Calhoun said. A properly prepared animal "just looks like velvet."

Without it, "they just don't show as well," Calhoun said. That's the part that takes work.

An exhibitor's cattle management skill shows in feeding. Calhoun knew she wanted an animal entering the show ring at about 1,200 pounds, generally considered an ideal slaughter weight.

When she brought Buckwheat home from a sale of likely guineas candidates last February, he weighed about 650 pounds. Although housed separately from other cattle, the steer ate a fairly routine diet of prepared grain and hay until about August.

Then Calhoun began adding corn to his diet to carefully manage weight gain.

"You just have to watch what you're feeding. You don't want to finish too quickly and hold at that weight, 'cause he'll get kind of stale," Calhoun said. Showing requires a certain amount of animal psychology, as well.

Calhoun figures she won this year's Queen's Guineas because Buckwheat happened to have a good day. He was up and co-operative.

It might as easily have been someone else's turn. But by raising the animal away from others, Calhoun broke



Sun Times photo by John Hope

Queen's Guineas winner Rosanne Calhoun with her trophies

"A lot would never raise them by themselves. They'd put two in. But my steers were always raised by themselves. It makes them their best friend. It but it is true."

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tween an animal and its handler that makes for a winner at the Royal. But it also makes for a difficult emotional break when the handler and animal must part.

"It was really sad to leave

him," she said. "I didn't go back into the barn to see him."

"They had people to look after him. So, I just left."

"You have an image of him that you want to remember him by," said Calhoun.

Queen's Guineas winner, Rosanne Calhoun, was honoured by her township when members of the Elderslie Township council presented Rosanne with an engraved silver tray, on December 21. In making the presentation, Councillor Ron Calhoun said Rosanne "worked hard for it. It wasn't all luck. She really did deserve to win." Elderslie Township Reeve Carmen Fullerton also praised Rosanne "for the honour you have brought, not only to yourself, but to the township." Rosanne won the Queen's Guineas competition at the Royal Winter Fair on November 20.

Mary Golem photo

