

MONARCH INTERNATIONAL'S

SHOW CIRCUIT

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You do not need a crystal ball to predict who tomorrow's professional stars will be. Just mosey on over to the junior rings and see who is sitting on an unfamiliar horse, taking input from its trainer, then trotting off to figure out the ride. They will tie the horse's number around their waist, then canter into the show ring with the hopes and expectations of others resting squarely on their shoulders.

Sometimes catch rides come about that quickly, and sometimes they are arranged weeks or months in advance. However the opportunities arise, they signal a young rider who has earned the appreciatively watchful eye of seasoned professionals looking at the future of their industry. They are often working students at their home barn, riding and schooling different horses every day.

"These riders are usually the ones with great professional prospects," notes Mike Nielsen, Pacific Coast Horse Show Association president and vice president of the California Professional Horsemen's Association. The CPHA unveiled new awards this year, including the Junior Horseman honor, which Mike guessed would go to just such a rider. He notes that catch riders used to be primarily those whose talents outstripped their families' ability to keep them competitively mounted, but says that is not so much the case anymore. Riders of every eco-



Rebecca Bruce: "The more you get into the ring, the more you learn."

nomie stratum seize this great stepping stone to becoming a professional.

Catch rides come about for many reasons. Often, the horse or pony needs to be shown off for sale, or earn points toward year-end awards or event qualifications. Sometimes it is simply a matter of more show mileage, perhaps in a new division, and often the catch rider is filling in for an owner that is unexpectedly out of commission.

Here we profile four of the country's most celebrated "mini professionals," as some call veteran catch riders: Natalie Rae Medlock, Alexandra Skiffington, Rebecca Bruce, and Molly Sullivan. Whether they will join the ranks of Will and Nicki Simpson, Susie Hutchison, Bert Mutch, Rusty Stewart, and the many other contemporary pros who started as stand-in stars remains to be seen. Certainly, they have the knack and the know-how for the job.

Stand-In Stars

Show Circuit profiles four of the country's most celebrated catch riders, each with great expectations and outstanding professional prospects.

By Kim F. Miller

REBECCA BRUCE

Rebecca Bruce sailed into the spotlight last year when she helped four of Stephanie Danhaki's horses earn top Junior Hunter Indio circuit awards with big wins while Stephanie was sidelined with a broken collarbone. Even so, the 16-year-old Rebecca, who wrapped up 2003 by winning the

LAHSA Medal Finals, has been a star at Mary Gatti's Rainbow Canyon Ranch for some time.

Rebecca started riding many different horses when her main mount, Command Performance, pulled a suspensory during the last week of Indio 2000 while leading the standings for Grand Circuit champion in the Children's division. "Mary [Gatti] put me on every horse in the barn," Rebecca recalls. "She said, 'Just go out there and ride as many as you can every day.'" Rebecca did, and she is grateful for Mary's advice: "The more you get into the ring, the more you learn." While she mostly catch-rides for barn mates, Archie Cox, Mike Edrick, and other trainers have called upon Rebecca's considerable talents. She started catch riding by competing on amateur rider and stable mate Jenny House's hunters, Amika, Second Glance, and NASDAQ. Showing Second Glance and NASDAQ in the Children's divisions helped sell them to other juniors.

When she came to the famed Azusa, CA, training barn almost five years ago, Rebecca was quickly taken in, even though Rainbow Canyon's clientele was mostly amateur at the time. Rebecca lives at her family's Sunnybrook Ranch in Santa Barbara. There she cares for numerous family horses and 10 boarded horses and gives lessons to local students when she is not on the road competing. She had not intended to train at a stable two hours away, but when she ran into some trouble with Command Performance, the family sought help from Patrick Spanton, Rainbow Canyon's main rider. One thing quickly led to another, and Rebecca is now a frequent resident at Rainbow Canyon's guest house.

Her catch riding and Sunnybrook Ranch responsibilities make her well prepared for a professional horse career, if she should choose that path. For now, she is mostly focused on the Equitation division, the USET Finals in particular, and on jumpers. She

STAND-IN STARS



Rebecca teaches when not competing.

found her new medal horse, Nottingham, this past fall in Germany. Even though he turned out to be a little greener than he seemed in Germany, he came along fast enough to help Rebecca in her LAHSA Dominion Medal Finals win. Rebecca says she would love to do some catch riding in the Jumper ring this year.

Rebecca also owns two horses that came through Rainbow Canyon's donation program: a "hot jumper type" turned 2002 Region One Junior Hunter Champion, Michelangelo; and Kingsland, her previous equitation horse, with whom she won the 2002 Stirrup Cup Medal Finals and won top equitation ribbons at Capitol Challenge. Both horses helped her earn the top year-end honor of being 2002 PCHA's Over-All High Point Equitation Champion and receive a beautiful Michael Tang portrait of Kingsland, provided by *Show Circuit*.

The horse donation program at Rainbow Canyon accepts horses with special training challenges or soundness issues and gives them the rehabilitation needed to find a new job and a home for life. The process of turning Michelangelo and Kingsland around is another feather in Rebecca's cap as a prospective professional.

Rebecca spent Thanksgiving week looking at colleges back East. Not surprisingly, she took a special interest in campuses with intercollegiate riding programs, where student teams compete on horses owned by the host school. The prospect of earning an athletic scholarship for her riding is appealing, and so is the idea of putting her catch-riding experiences to work for her school of choice. "I'm not going to pick my school just because of the riding program," she says, "but it sure would be fun to ride on their team."

"At the moment, I'm not actively pursuing catch riding," Rebecca says. "But I definitely feel lucky to be able to do it and I hope to continue with it." She is particularly grateful to family friend Jenny House, and to Stephanie Danhaki and her trainer Archie Cox, for the opportunities they have provided her. At the top of her thank-you list is Rainbow Canyon's Mary, Patrick, and Kim Tasker. "They've all been really supportive," she says.



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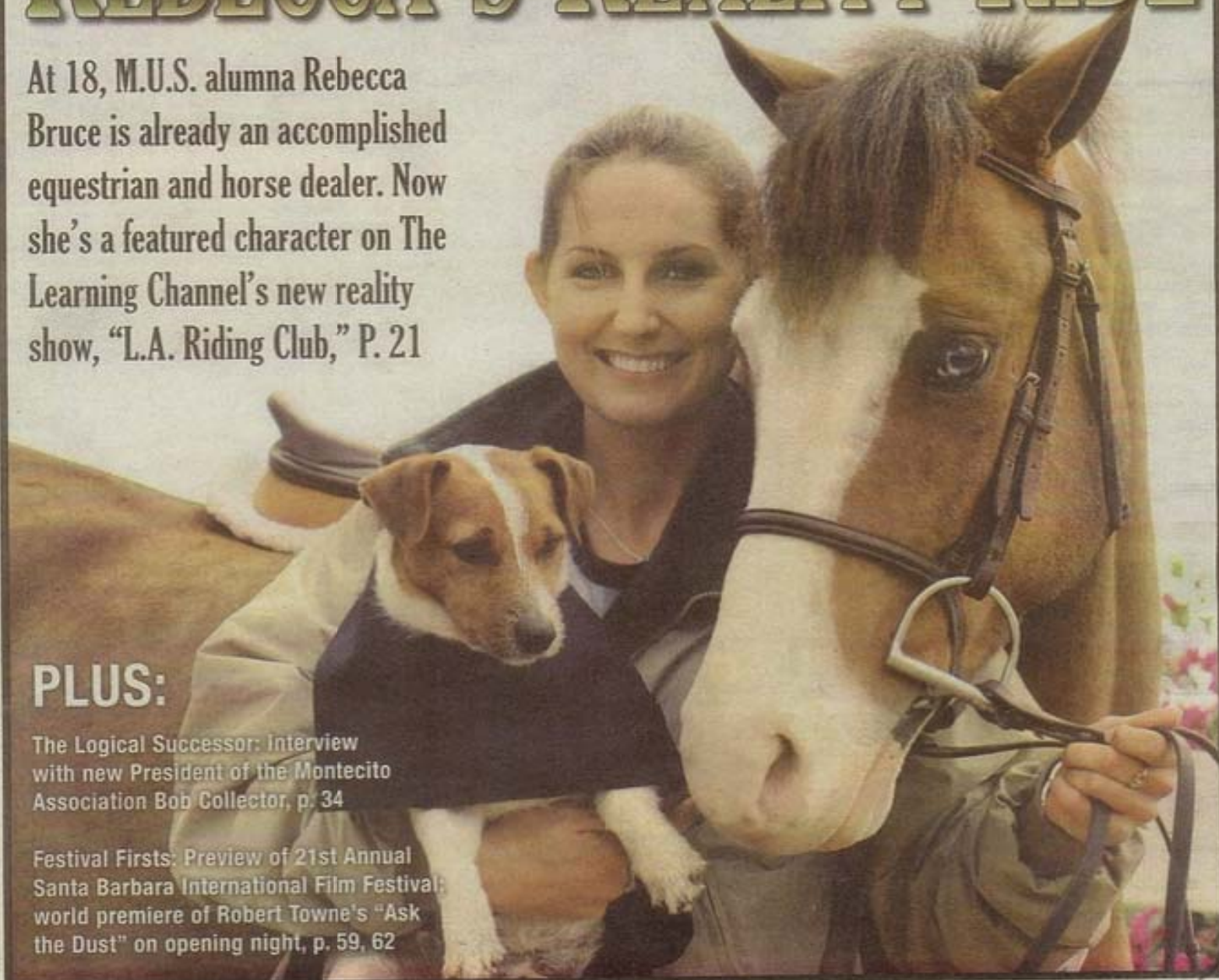
REBECCA'S REALITY RIDE

At 18, M.U.S. alumna Rebecca Bruce is already an accomplished equestrian and horse dealer. Now she's a featured character on The Learning Channel's new reality show, "L.A. Riding Club," P. 21

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COVER PHOTO: Rebecca Bruce with one of her show ponies, Blue Crush, and her Jack Russell, Sunny (photo by: Breehan Yobe-Mellor)