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NEWS RELEASE

10-Day Equine Highlights from the 2009 Calgary Stampede

Calgary -- Maximum horsepower. That's what burst out of the stables and into the arena during 10 days' worth of equine excitement at the 2009 Calgary Stampede.

The Stampede's equine events are annually driven by the Heavy Horse shows and the trio of top-notch Western Performance Horse competitions -- the Working Cow Horse Classic, the Team Cattle Penning Competition and the Stampede's Cutting Horse Competition. This year, the competitors sat pretty tall in the saddle.

"All of our competitions were phenomenal," says Christine Sowiak, chair of the Stampede's Western Performance Horse committee. "We had an excellent draw of top-quality horses and riders from across North America, and a particularly brilliant showcase of Canadian horses, Canadian-bred horses and Canadian trainers, both open and non-professional."

Calgary's Ron Mathison was the first to have his name engraved on the Stampede's inaugural Elite Western Rider Award, which celebrates excellence in the Western Performance Horse events.

Mathison won the Elite Western Rider Award, which comes with a handcrafted Stampede belt buckle, by posting two Top-10 finishes in Western Performance Horse events. He finished fourth overall in the Non-Pro Bridle category of the Working Cow Horse Classic, and also placed fourth in the final of the 14 Class in Team Cattle Penning.

Lindsey Thorlakson of Carstairs, Alta., was the only two-time champion in this year's Team Cattle Penning events, winning the 10 Class final with Jordan Lesh of Morrison, Okla., and Barrie Price of Calgary, and then teaming up with father Ben Thorlakson and Brian Dick of Wetaskiwin for victory in the 7 Class final. Travis Kaiser of Ontario, Wisc., Joel Lesh of Perry, Okla., and Sonya Buckner of Magee, Miss., won the Open Class, while Phil Mainey of Victor, Mont., Kurt Robson, of Carstairs, Alta., and Deanne Foster, of Grande Prairie, Alta., claimed the 14 Class at the Pengrowth Saddledome.

The Stampede's Cutting Horse Competition climbed to the ranks of the elite this year, as part of the National Cutting Horse Association's 6666 Ranch World Series of Cutting. Smart Frele Cat, a seven-year-old American quarter horse gelding, carried two Canadians to Stampede titles under the Big Top -- first Les Timmons of Kamloops, B.C., in the Open division, then Rod MacDonald of Stump Lake, B.C., in the Non-Pro class. Calgary's Andrea Rudkin was tops in the Youth Division aboard Right on CD.

In the Stampede's Working Cow Horse Classic, John Swales of Millarville, Alta., captured the Open Bridle and Open Hackamore classes, while John's brother Clint Swales of High River was Limited Open Bridle champ and Donna O'Reilly of Millarville won the Limited Open Hackamore class under the Big Top. Suzon Schaal of Millarville and Genuine Brown Gal won both the Non-Pro Bridle and Novice Non-Pro Bridle titles.

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The big boys of the barns also came out to play in the Heavy Horse Pull, presented by DundeeWealth, with widespread chatter about the tremendous condition of this year's draft horses.

"Absolutely, beyond a doubt, the best competition we've ever had," says Dale Befus, chair of the Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull committee. "Great teams. Great teamsters. The comment around the barns was: 'Wow.' No team ran away with any of our competitions. In the lightweight final, all the teams were still competing at 9,000 pounds, and that's never happened before."

Stan Grad's Belgian outfit out of Airdrie, with Uruguayan Nicolas Pouso holding the reins, won the Heavy Horse Pull's heavyweight division, setting a new Stampede arena record by pulling 13,100 pounds the full distance of 14 feet. Bob McGowan of Lebanon, Ore., won the middleweight class, and Jordan Hanson of Chatfield, Minn., reigned supreme in the lightweight class under the Big Top.

The Heavy Horse Show, presented by DundeeWealth, took place over the first weekend of Stampede '09, with a familiar rig, the Express Clydesdales of Oklahoma City, Okla., finally winning the World Champion Six Horse Hitch Competition in the Saddledome.

"We celebrated our 10th anniversary of performing with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. All of our breeds were very well represented -- Belgians, Clydesdales, Percherons and Shires," says Jess Debnam, chair of the Stampede's Heavy Horse Show committee.

"And it was great to see the Express Clydesdales, who've been supporting our show and supporting the Stampede for years, get recognized like they did," adds Debnam. "It was recognition that was well earned."

Calgary's K.C. Pappas enjoyed a superb showing at the Canadian National Miniature Horse Show. First Knights American Idol, representing her sixth generation of breeding work, was named Supreme Halter Horse, the overall champion of this year's show, while another of her mini steeds, Flyin Hearts Champagne & Roses, was overall runner-up.

The Light Horse Demonstrations and Displays featured 16 breeds of Light Horses, with 10 days' worth of exhibitions and presentations in the Agriculture Barns.

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.