

MidWeek

Waialua Teen Wins Extreme Cowboy Youth World Championship

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Elena Aoki charges through an obstacle at the EXCA 2013 World Championships in Hamilton, Texas.

Photo from Celma Aoki.

Waialua High student Elena Aoki has loved riding horses for most of her 14 years, but a competition two weeks ago in Texas may just be the crowning moment of her early career.

Aoki came home from Hamilton, Texas, bearing the Youth World Champion title at the EXCA (Extreme Cowboy Association) races – officially the EXCA 2013 Harmony Farms World Championship.

“She’s been working hard toward her horse-riding,” said her mother, Celma Aoki, who should know.

She added that Elena also belongs to the U.S. Pony Club and competes in the hunter-jumper circuit here.

But the lure of the extreme cowboy events could not be denied.

The competitions are “safe, fun and consistent,” claims EXCA on its web-site. Celma Aoki explained further that the competition is all about challenges and obstacles.

The Youth course alone presents 13 obstacles in addition to judging for horsemanship and time.

As an example, she said, there's a floating bridge that rider and horse must cross, and they place a large stuffed bear right next to the bridge to see if it distracts the horse from its task.

"They don't know what challenges they will have to go through until a few hours prior to the race," she noted. "Therefore, rider and horse must show trust in each other."

Also competing successfully Oct. 31-Nov. 3 in Texas from Team Hawaii and from Kawailoa Ranch were Gianna Sbarbaro and Piper Crabtree (first and second place, respectively, in Young Guns); Kayla Ginella and Paris Starn (first and third in Novice); and in Youth: Aoki (1), Ginella (2), Meilan Sim (3), Starn (6) and Brooke Matson (7).