

CANADIAN LOPES OFF WITH COWBOY UP CHALLENGE

By {ga=terri-mason}and posted on July 29, 2010



First time competitor Glenn Stewart of Baldonnel, B.C., cruises to victory aboard his stallion Genuine Jet Smooth at the inaugural Cowboy Up Challenge at the Calgary Stampede. An Extreme Cowboy Racing rookie, Stewart's victory was worth \$5,000. photo credit: Calgary Stampede

Against a throng of American heavy hitters, during the first Extreme Cowboy Race held in Canada, Glenn Stewart and Genuine Jet Smooth, his faithful 10-year-old quarter horse stallion, emerged as the unexpected winners of the inaugural Calgary Stampede Cowboy Up Challenge on Monday afternoon at the Pengrowth Saddledome.

“I was learning from them other contestants. They’ve done this lots, and it was my first go at it,” said Stewart, who operates The Horse Ranch in Baldonnel, B.C. “I was thinking, better pay attention to what’s going on out here, and see if I can learn something.”

During Monday’s 12-team championship final of the Cowboy Up Challenge, Stewart and Genuine Jet Smooth were fast and clean and smooth and nearly flawless, negotiating the obstacles on the Saddledome infield with ease and grace. Stewart’s winning score from the event’s two-man judging team was 110.5, good for a \$5,000 cheque, a coveted Stampede championship buckle, and an automatic berth at the Extreme Cowboy Association’s (EXCA) world championship later this year at Topeka, Kansas.

Robin Bond of Vista, Calif., placed second, collecting a reserve champion’s cheque of \$4,000 and Kelly LeBlanc of Riga, Mich., was third for \$2,000.

Stewart spends about 250 days a year conducting horsemanship clinics, camps and courses, some of which take place out in his stomping grounds, the wilds of northeastern British Columbia. His American Stampede opponents arrived with plenty of Extreme Cowboy Race experience under their belt, but Stewart’s only EXCA event was a clinic and demonstration held by the sport’s founder, Craig Cameron, held in March at the Corral on Stampede Park, where he finished third.

“We do years of riding out in the bush, out in the corral and up in the mountains, with nobody around, and you’re workin’ and workin’ and workin’ on your horsemanship, trying to improve,” said Stewart. “This (Cowboy Up Challenge) just came out of nowhere. I have a lot of friends who poked and prodded me to get into this, let the Stampede know I was around.

“So I jumped in it in March, with two weeks’ notice, and they let me enter this one. Unbelievable.”

Extreme Cowboy Racing is a timed and judged event that demands both horsemanship and speed, and challenges both horse and rider with an obstacle course that may include such challenges as moguls, bridges, log crossings, tunnels, cowboy curtains, roll backs, and water crossings, among others.

Judges award points for each obstacle, on a scale of one to 10, based on criteria such as horsemanship, cadence, control, and overall execution. Horse-and-rider teams are required to complete each obstacle within a predetermined time period to collect points.

Extreme Cowboy Racing, sanctioned by the Bluff Dale, Texas-based EXCA, staged 70 events in 22 American states, from Hawaii to Maine, during its first official season of competition in 2009, and more than 100 events are scheduled for this year.

Stewart traveled nearly 1,000 kilometres from Baldonnel, just east of Fort St. John, B.C., to participate in the Cowboy Up Challenge. Will he take EXCA up on its offer and travel another 2,000 clicks to Topeka?

“I guess I should go,” he said, a grin spreading across his face. “Quite often, my schedule’s booked a year in advance, with clinics and camps and (an annual horsemanship tour of) Brazil. But if they’re giving me a bye, I’ll have to try and fit it in there somehow.”