



Matt Kelly and Genuine Chic Pleaser

When Matt Kelly rode Genuine Chic Pleaser (Chic Please x Miss Shiner Dear x Shining Spark) to the NRCHA Stakes Limited Open Bridle Championship, it became his most significant achievement to date at a major cow horse show. Kelly, 38, is the head trainer at Wagonhound Land & Livestock, Douglas, Wyo., an NRCHA Breeder Sponsor. He recently began crossing over from ranch horses to show horses.

Reined Cow Horse News: How did you get started as a horse trainer?

Matt Kelly: I grew up in Montana. We had a hunting and fishing outfitting business. I was always around horses but didn't really start training until about 12 years ago, when I started my first 2-year-old. I made a ranch horse out of him. I hired on with Wagonhound about 10 years ago and it all developed from there. For about five or six years, all I did was start colts and show some ranch horses. Three years ago, we started showing in the cow horse and it is totally different than the ranch horse shows. It's been fun; it's been challenging. I love it. It's a true passion. I feel very blessed to be able to do for a living what I'm passionate about.

CROSSOVER ARTIST

Up-and-coming professional Matt Kelly excels in both the ranch horse and reined cow horse arenas. *By Stephanie Duquette*

RCHN: What has been the biggest challenge in making that transition to the show pen?

MK: In the arena, everything has to be precise, right there, right now. Your horse has to be completely with you. When you're working outside, or even in those ranch horse competitions, you're not scrutinized nearly as closely. Here, the judges are particular, so you have to be spot-on. This [the NRCHA Stakes] is probably the biggest show I've been to. When I go home now, the horses are going to have to step it up so they're more ready when they come here. I think you have to ride them 110 percent at home so they'll be 100 percent when you come to town.

RCHN: What is the focus of the Wagonhound horse program?

MK: The main focus is really, really nice ranch horses. We'll bring the cream of the crop to the shows, but they've got to be ranch horses first. All these show horses have drug calves to the fire and doctored yearlings and done all of the ranch work. When they've got to work for a living, it develops their mind. They mature a lot quicker and it's easier to get them through high-pressure situations at a show.

RCHN: What is your history with Genuine Chic Pleaser?

MK: He's ranch-raised [the 2007 gelding was bred by Wagonhound Land & Livestock]. I started him as a 2-year-

old. He was sold, and then we ended up back with him last year. He hadn't been on a cow until last year. Andrea Fappani [the leading reining horse trainer] bought him and had him for a year, and then he was a guest horse for the owner in California for a while, and then he came back to Wyoming and we started him on cows. He's come along real quick on a cow. He's been fun to ride.

RCHN: What did it feel like riding after Andrea?

MK: It helped me a ton in the reining. You can feel how it's supposed to feel. But when I started getting him on a cow, we had some issues to overcome, to get him thinking on his own and let the cow direct what he's doing as opposed to just paying attention to what I want him to do.

RCHN: What advice would you give to other trainers who want to get started showing?

MK: Get help. Go ride with as many different people as you can, because you're going to learn something from everybody. The rut I got stuck in was, I'd go ride with somebody, and then that's what I'd do for six months. Then I'd go ride with somebody else and find out that three months ago, I should have changed this, this and this, but I didn't know any better. If you can, go ride with a lot of different people, as often as you can.