

Young cattle farmer wins big at Royal Winter Fair



By Brock Weir

Selena Stronach has a little corner of her barn bearing an ever-widening row of ribbons collected at fairs around Ontario.

But the 12-year-old Aurora cattle farmer will have to make room for a few more this week as she basks in the glory of a big win Saturday at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Her cow, Bugsy, won Grand Champion at the Royal, and came very close to reaching the pinnacle of Supreme.

"It was really exciting for me," said Selena at her Daisy Springs farm in east Aurora.

Selena caught the passion for cattle breeding from her father, Andy, and was truly bitten by the bug over three years ago when he entered some prized Angus in an agricultural show in Orangeville.

"My dad owns a lot of cows and he showed a cow once named Georgina in Orangeville," says Selena. "I really fell in love with showing cows because it is so fascinating when you get to go into the show ring, even at huge shows like the Royal."

Although she didn't get into the ring herself this year, watching from the sidelines as her cows made the grade was no less exciting. Selena started Daisy Springs when she got her first cow, the aptly named "Daisy." Daisy was a bit of a challenge for the budding farmer.

"When she first came, Daisy wasn't happy here," she recalls. "They broke her from her mom too early and she didn't have the attitude [for showing] and she is still not a cow that you would show in a show ring."

Nevertheless, Daisy has pride of place in her new home, contented, and very happy to see Selena when she strides out on the field. Although they are Angus cattle, they are, at the end of the day, her pets – and among a menagerie that includes a dog, rabbits, and a new kitten making himself at home in the barn.

"I'm an animal lover," says Selena. "I just like any type of animal, but cows are my favourite. They are really gentle and they are made for mankind, unlike most animals that try to bite your head off!"

In the run-up to the Royal, or any show, for that matter, Selena likens the process to a "beauty pageant." Judges look for a "big, masculine-looking" cow regardless of gender, special preparation needs to be done to their fur to accentuate their muscles, and there needs to be training to keep their heads held high and their gait even," she says. Waddling, she added, should be kept to a minimum.

"You walk them to get their walk right, and you get them to practice for a show. When you get up there, you bathe them to make them beautiful, blow dry them, and clip them. If it's the day before a show, you then put them in a box stall so they won't get dirty."

Selena not only came back from the Royal with a ribbon, but also a new calf bought to join the family at Daisy Springs. When she looks for a new cow to add to the farm, she looks for one that is calm, cool, and collected, one that can face the scrutiny of being in the ring.

Raising cattle is not just a hobby for Selena. She hopes to continue to do this on a professional basis. Right now, she is a member of the 4H Club, which goes every year to the Royal, participating in the agricultural shows.

?If you love what you're doing and really commit to it, you can get a scholarship to a great agricultural school and you can learn all about agriculture,? she says.

In the more immediate future, however, Selena has her eyes firmly on spring shows in Orangeville, and then future shows close by such as Markham and Uxbridge, and as far afield as Prince Edward Island.