



Cooper Smith with his 2008 reserve youth world champion 3-year-old mare, RPL Ms Cheerful.

K. C. MONTGOMERY

## SPOTLIGHT ON:

# Cooper Smith

*This young man makes  
a habit of lending a  
helping hand where he can.*

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**By Christine Hamilton**

DRESSING DRAG, TRADING PONIES AND MINIATURE BRAHMAS, feeding up pigs to process. You might not think any of these things would have anything in common with a youth who shows halter horses. But they do.

Cooper Smith does or has done all of that with one purpose behind it: to help someone else, in some way or another.

The 17-year-old high school senior from Whitesboro, Texas, is a familiar face in horse show circles. The son of AQHA Professional Horseman Jason and Julie Smith, Cooper and his sister, Shyanne, have grown up horse showing on the weekends. From his first Ford AQHYA World Championship Show in 2002 through 2009, there have been only three years where Cooper hasn't won a youth reserve or world championship in halter. In two of those three years, he was in the top five, and this year he didn't show.

But if you talk to horse show folk across the country who have been around the Smith family for many of those weekends and ask them what comes to mind when they think of Cooper, his friendly face at the end of a good horse's lead shank might not be what they mention first.

"You have no idea what that young man has done," said trainer Doug Landon of Clark, Missouri. A cancer survivor himself, Doug founded the successful March to the Arch in 2005, an annual cancer benefit horse show.

"When I was diagnosed with cancer, his family helped out my fiancée (Lana Brooks) quite a bit," Doug said. "We were

up at a futurity with a load of horses, and his dad showed them, that kind of thing. Ever since, we've been close.

"When I started with the horse show, Cooper jumped right in as one of my major sponsors when he was 13. He did it on his own, not piggy-backed onto his parents at all."

As Doug recalled, that first year Cooper donated a miniature Brahma bull to be auctioned as a benefit item, and it brought more than \$2,400. Cooper has donated something every year since, from ponies to a driving donkey in 2009, and they've all been high-dollar items. He has also participated with his dad in the show's "ladies" pleasure class dressing in drag – again, all for charity.

"It's from my folks," Cooper said. "As a kid I felt, I don't want to say obligated, but it makes you feel good. You're doing stuff to help people that you know. I mean, anybody could get cancer: family, friends, anybody."

In addition to the horses, the Smith youngsters have also had quite a bit of success showing pigs. Cooper and Shyanne regularly keep 20-25 pigs to feed during the winter to get ready to show.

"We've all won belt buckles," Cooper said. "We all take care of them together, work them together. It's a cool deal."

And that has led to another charity project that Cooper has become involved in with horse show friend and NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Terry Bradshaw. Terry asked



Cooper has turned his experience showing pigs into charity.

Cooper to help him buy some pigs so he could start raising them for his family.

“He said, ‘If I’m going to do it, I’m going to do it right,’” Cooper recalled. “‘Get two good ones.’ So we got two good ones, and then he came up with the whole idea of Pigs for Jesus.”

The nonprofit organization raises pigs to provide pork for a local food bank that serves needy families in the region around Gainesville, Texas, and Marietta, Oklahoma. The pigs are raised at Terry’s ranch in Thackerville, Oklahoma. Cooper helps out with providing pigs and the meat.

“A lady (from the food bank) called the other day and said, ‘We’ve never seen anything like this in our lives,’” Cooper said. “I don’t remember the exact numbers, but I want to say they fed, like, 1,200 people with one pig, with stew and food like that.”

Food banks find good, fresh meat hard to come by.

“I think it’s one time a month they go on a Saturday around to older people and take them a hot meal,” Cooper said. “And they said it was the first time in a long time a lot of them had ever eaten real pork, not Spam or something like that.”

As a senior, Cooper has started to look ahead to what life might look like after he finishes high school. For now, he’ll continue to show horses and pigs with his family, escaping to mini-vacations at the lake when they can. He has won a scholarship to a nearby community college through his success in high school horse judging competition.

“I think I want to get an ag teaching degree and minor in business,” Cooper said. “I don’t know yet, but if I get my ag teacher’s degree, I might not ever use it, but I’ll have it. It’s something I love to do, and it would be something I could do if I needed to.

“I don’t want to move too far, because I want to still trade and do things like Doug’s horse show and with Terry.”

Cooper has a lot to say for his agricultural, horse world upbringing.

“The horse show deal has made me grow up and mature and do more at a younger age,” he said. “It has been good for me. It’s something that I love.

“I learned a lot. We’re at the horse show every weekend. (As a kid), you talk to a lot of people. You learn social skills and you’re going to learn responsibility. You’ve got to feed, you’ve got to water; you’ve got to take care of them.

“It’s kind of funny, but we were all talking a couple of nights ago, some kids together (at the 2009 Ford Youth World). But there’s a

difference in some of our friends at home and our friends at horse shows. (In the horse world), you understand that there’s a time and a place for everything. You’ve got to take care of business, and then there’s time you can go play. It’s good when you win because you’ve done the work and everything.

“Dad has always trained horses; we’ve always done it as a family. But he told me when we started, ‘If you want to show, you can show. If you want to play chess, play chess. Just whatever you’re going to do, do it good.’”

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The Smith family on vacation:  
Jason, Julie, Cooper and Shyanne.