

Girls Gone Wild West



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The All-American Cowgirl Chicks — Engaging In Tricky Business

BY CAROLINE HARPER

The Death Drag. Under the Neck. Hippodrome Stand. No, those aren't yoga poses. They are just a few of the tricks executed by Trish Lynn and the All American Cowgirl Chicks.

Though she grew up loving to sing and dance, Lynn also grew up around horses, and has always considered herself a true cowgirl. She was born and raised in the Fort Worth area, but moved to Weatherford when the urban sprawl threatened to turn her into a city girl, even if just geographically.

She pursued her childhood dream of becoming an entertainer and by the age of 18 had recorded her first album and had four hit singles. The music business, however, proved to be tougher than she had anticipated. But, she always had her ranch and her horses in Weatherford to come back to. While her music career was

on the backburner, Lynn focused on her passion for riding.

"I never lost that love for horses," Lynn said. "I just think they're awesome animals. I think it's a wonderful way of life to live. I think it's a healthy way of life to live."

As a long-time horsewoman, Lynn had long admired the Catalena Cowgirls, a rodeo drill team out of Bryan/College Station. She decided that she would like to put together a rodeo drill team of her own, and so she did. But, ever the entertainer, she wasn't content to delight her audience with precision horse drills. She wanted to wow them, and trick riding was just the thing.

She had encountered legendary trick roper and rider, J.W. Stoker, at several rodeos over the years, and she was drawn to his death-defying feats.

"Mr. Stoker was usually the act, and I would sing the national anthem, so I followed him a lot," Lynn said. "We

actually performed a lot together and he didn't know it."

Lynn approached Stoker about teaching her and her girls some tricks, but he wasn't easy to convince at first.

"He didn't take me on overnight," Lynn said. "I had to prove myself. He said 'I will teach you this. Most people walk away from it. I've given my life to it. You've got to promise me you'll stick with it.'"

Stoker remembers the exchange pretty much the same.

"She tried, I don't know how long, to get a hold of me," he said. "I saw that they were sincere about it and wanted to do it right, so I've been doing it ever since."

Whenever Stoker is around, Lynn and all of the cowgirl chicks give him their rapt attention and, of course, their respect. Whatever he says goes.

"Just when we think we might know something, he says 'You're doing it wrong,'" Lynn said. "He'll tell us and we'll say 'why didn't we think of that?' He's totally incredible. I cannot tell you how blessed we are. We would not be where we are without him and his knowledge."

A man of few words, Stoker offers his opinion of the girls: "These little gals ride good. They pay attention."



Lynn and the Chicks recently got to repay Stoker for all his hard work and dedication to them. In anticipation of Stoker's induction into the ProRodeo Hall of Fame in July of this year, Lynn and the Chicks delivered his saddle and chaps to the facility in Colorado Springs.

Of course, every performance honors Stoker.

"Our theme the last two years has been 'The All American Cowgirl Chicks: The Legend Lives On'... through J.W. Stoker," Lynn said. "Every time we go to an arena, you can see him, every breath, when they make a run, he's right in there with them."

The Chicks also ride and perform in honor of several organizations close to their hearts. They dedicate every rodeo to America's fallen soldiers. For a performance during the 2010 Tournament of Roses Equestfest, they included a military tribute to all soldiers. They also honored Pfc. Austin Staggs, who was from Weatherford, during the performance as well as during the Rose Parade. The Chicks are also very active with Snowball Express, a charity that honors the children and spouses of fallen soldiers with a 5-day-long, all-expenses paid gathering every December.



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They have had 501(c)(3) status since 2007 and also ride to raise money for cancer research, a cause that recently has become more personal, as Trish's daughter, Sadie, was diagnosed with breast cancer in September 2010. She has already had one surgery, and will have another in the near future.

Sadie, as well as Trish's two other daughters, Hattie and Georgia, all grew up around horses and have been Chicks since they were little girls. It would seem to be in their blood. Trish, who, in addition to being their mother, is also their coach, says it never gets any less scary watching her girls perform.

"All of them have been down," Lynn said. "The great thing is they get back in the saddle. That's what the cowgirl definition is. You just have to cowgirl up and get through it. By the grace of God, we've gotten through a lot of dangerous situations unscathed."



J.W. Stoker and Roy Rogers

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Some of those situations have, no doubt, arisen as a result of their custom of riding horses that have been cast-off or deemed dangerous or non-rideable. One of the Chicks, Ginger Duke, whom Lynn calls a “go-getter”, has recently been working hard breaking in a string of mustangs. One of them, Dollar, is now used regularly during performances.

“We continue to work with horses that have problems, but we work them out...the horses are so much a part of what we do,” Lynn said.

The Chicks are always cognizant of the fact that any horse, even a “good” one, can have issues.

“They might have been a solid horse all their life and something just spooks them,” Sadie said. “You’ve always got to be on your toes, especially with new girls and new horses.”

The newest official Chick is Brandi Earl, whose addition to the Chicks seemed fated. She had been an admirer and thought about joining, but never got up the courage to contact Lynn. When she saw the Chicks’ ad on Craigslist while searching for a part-time job, she knew she had to call. After she was hired, Earl worried about the traveling aspect of the job. Lynn and the Chicks perform pretty much every weekend, and usually are gone from Wednesday to Sunday.

“I thought I was going to be really homesick,” Earl said. “Now that I’m

on the team, Sadie’s the best friend I’ve ever had in my entire life. I don’t like being home. When I come home I stay here [at the ranch] most of the time.”

For Earl, being a Chick has been a life-changing experience.

“I can’t imagine not doing it...it’s kind of like the missing piece in your life and when you find it you just, you don’t want to go without it.”

Lynn says, however, that for every Brandi there are five or ten girls who can’t hack the life of a Chick. The Chicks require a one-year internship, but rarely does she see one who actually lasts that long.

“I have a lot of girls who inquire and a lot of girls that want to do it,

and not a whole lot of them stick,” Lynn said. “Just because of the schedule and commitment. This is a team that you have to be dedicated and committed to.”

“Most of the time they’ll go one or two performances and then they’re done,” added Earl. “They don’t want to do anything more than that. They don’t want to travel, they don’t want to sleep in a trailer, they don’t want to take cowboy showers, they don’t want to bathe horses and saddle and practice and do everything that they need to do.”

Lynn says many new girls can get caught up in and take too much stock in gossip. Earl concurs.

“All these girls are brutally honest with each other,” she said. “They want each other to be better, and a lot of the new girls can’t take that. I think that’s where a lot of the gossip and the bad comments come from.”

Ultimately, those girls who do succeed in moving up are the ones

“These little gals ride good. They pay attention.”

— J.W. Stoker



Brandi Earl, J.W. Stoker, Sadie Lynn

who are able to focus on their riding and disregard any petty talk. They are the ones who are rewarded with the opportunity to join an elite group of performers.

"They're very close and work really hard," Lynn said. "I'm extremely proud of them because a lot of people didn't think they could do it."

Mr. Stoker, as all the girls, including Lynn, call him, also has high praise for the Chicks.

"They don't want to get by the easiest way because that's what everybody does," he said. "So many trick riders want their horses to go slow because they think it's easier, but it's actually harder. They want to do easier tricks so there's no chance of falling off or anything. You've got to take the chance and you're not going to fall, anyway, if you practice and know what you're doing."

In addition to their weekly performances, the Chicks also hold training camps every summer. They have camps for everyone, from beginners to advanced riders.

Lynn says the camps attract a lot of young girls, but, surprisingly, many older women as well, who in the past may have been scared away from riding after accidents or other bad experiences and want to get their confidence back.

One of the current Chicks, Shannon Murrell, came to be on the team after she took lessons from the Chicks.

"Her riding skills have totally done a 180," Lynn said. "She's unreal. She's become so strong, an athlete."

In addition to local and out-of-state rodeos, the Chicks have been to some pretty exotic places, including a 2008



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trip to Sweden for the Stockholm International Horse Show. They had been recommended to the organizers by horse whisperer Monty Roberts, who had to back out at the last minute. The Chicks served as ambassadors for the United States and performed to packed houses.

"We were just blown away and honored," Lynn said. "It was the most wonderful experience. They truly supported America and we were welcomed with open arms, and they just catered to us like nobody's business. They had never seen anything like us before."

The chicks have no plans to slow down any time soon. And they don't seem to mind.

"We perform non-stop, we really don't have any off weekends," Lynn said. "It's a good thing for us because of the type of entertainment that we do, we want to stay busy."

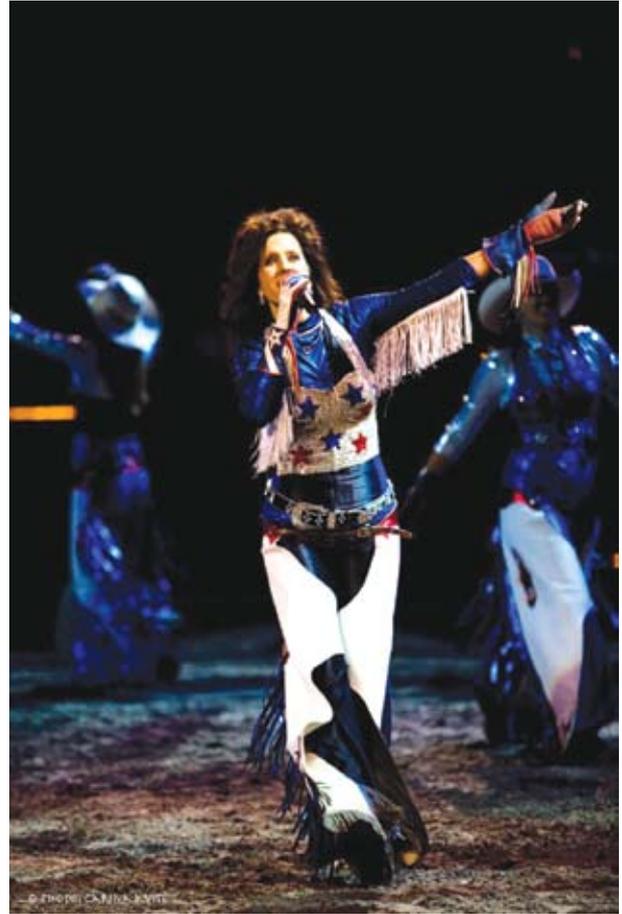
Trish's daughters echo their mother's sentiments.

"It's a lot of fun because we're the ones that are riding the horses," Hattie said. "We're the ones who get to be helping them and helping the other girls."

Added Sadie: "We're enjoying every bit of it...the feedback you get is so amazing and you can't replace that. We know that we worked hard. It's taught us a lot, and we have more respect for a lot of other people."

"I made him a promise when [Stoker] first took me on," said Lynn. "I'm going to continue that promise that we're going to learn all that we can from him and continue it on." 🍌

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