

"I'm going to be president of that organization someday."

That's exactly what Mike Martin Jr. told his parents back in 1974 while attending his first AJQHA World Championship Show.

"My husband and I laughed about it at the time; we kind of took it as a joke," his mother explained.

Mike, who was legally given his father's name but is often called "Rusty" by close friends, found himself a man of his word six years later.

At the most recent AJQHA World Show held at Tulsa, Oklahoma, Rusty was elected to the national office of president. Well qualified for the job, the 19-year-old had previously held almost every office in his state's junior association, served as AJQHA Treasurer and, last year, took over the position of first vice president.

"I worked my way up, just like Charles Hart and Bobby Norris did. (Hart was the 1978 president, and Norris followed in 1979.) When I first ran as a national candidate, it was surprising to me that someone from way up here in the boondocks would even have a chance of getting elected. So far, I'm the only youth from the state of Washington to have ever run for AJQHA President, much less get chosen."

Rusty hails from the little town of Brewster, which is, as he explains, "the halfway point between Seattle and Spokane." With a growing population of 1,200, the town is situated smack dab in the middle of thousands of acres of orchards, right next to the Columbia River, and far enough away from Mt. St. Helens as to not be affected by the ash. Located in its downtown area are a few small shops, a grocery store and the Chevrolet dealership which is owned by Rusty's dad.

"The dealership has kept us pretty busy lately. Whereas we used to attend about 35 to 40 shows during the summer, this last year we only went to about 15," Rusty's mother, Pat, remarked. "Rusty and his younger brother, Shaun, both work part-time at the shop, and I'm the appointed bookkeeper," she added.

Also, from atop the hills at Brewster, the ski resort of Mission Ridge is visible. "I used to downhill race when I was just a kid," Rusty commented, "and Mom was an instructor there."

But as the years passed by, the Martins found themselves more involved with cleaning show halters

and saddles, rather than waxing their skis.

"I had always been around horses, and like Rusty, I can't remember when I didn't have a horse," Pat related. "Now, Mike, he became involved after we got married. We both grew up around this area, met when I was a junior and he was a senior in high school, and ended up together. Although Mike's parents weren't that fond of horses, he decided to go ahead and keep me.

"I kept on showing horses when we were first married, and then Rusty came along in 1961. When the nurse brought him in to me, she said, 'Well, it looks as if we've got a rusty one,' (due to his bright red hair) and the name sorta stuck."

Rusty got his first pony when he was six. "I liked the fact that I was a lot closer to the ground," he admitted quite frankly. "I had the pony for about a year, and then I began showing at halter. My parents would show in adult, and then they'd let me lead the horse into the youth class.

"My dad sometimes gets razzed by some of his friends when he shows," Rusty chuckled for a moment. "I remember one time I had won the youth halter, and he had placed further down the line in adult. Along the rail, you could hear them yelling, 'Let the kid do it.' But it was all in fun, and he didn't seem to mind the teasing.

"Dad, he really likes taking care of the halter horses, and that's all he'll show in. Consequently, he still gets a little nervous and starts chewing gum before he enters the arena. Mom, she just lets him do his thing and she concentrates on the riding events."

However, her concentration was also directed toward her son's improvement in the show ring. "Catahoula Bay was the gelding Rusty showed in 1970," his mom said. "Then, we got Dinah's Mac, and that's when I helped teach Rusty how to ride."

In the meantime, while Rusty was figuring out how to cue his horse and sit a trot, in addition to attending youth clinics at Dwayne and Melba Shahan's place at Colfax, Washington, the AJQHA had been organized. "That same year — 1970 — I had joined the state association, but it wasn't until the following year that I became an AJQHA member," Rusty noted.

The youth had the chance to meet new friends at the meetings, and Rusty also became acquainted

Mike "Rusty" Martin, Jr. AJQHA President

by Helena Biasatti



The Columbia River winds through the small town of Brewster, Washington, and a peaceful walk along its bank is relaxing as well as enjoyable.



Rusty rides his roping horse, Bud, through the pastures near his home.



Krisie Three and Rusty relax under the shade of a willow tree.

with another new face. In 1972, he took that new face, Barbara's Dorame, and earned several points in showmanship, western horsemanship and pleasure. Dinah's Mac was handed down to Shaun, and shortly afterwards, Rusty received a sorrel mare named Char Ann Tivio.

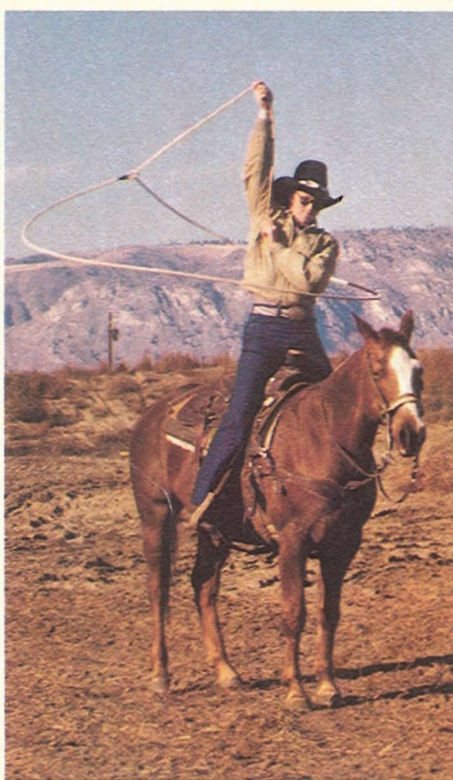
The next year, Rusty celebrated his 12th birthday, and when a lot of young boys might begin to have trouble with acne, Rusty instead faced the trauma of freckles. "My face was covered with them; I was just as freckle-faced as they come."

Freckles or no freckles, Rusty still managed to hold his own against other youth competitors, and in 1974 aboard Char Ann, he won his first all-around. That certain trophy carries a lot of prestige as it sits alone on a piano in the family's living room. For that bronze-colored replica of the Quarter Horse was the only all-around Rusty ever received.

"I was so close so many times in earning another one but I was always a point or two behind. I guess close only counts in horseshoes, right? Unfortunately, I was also three points shy of earning a youth superior in western pleasure with Char Ann."

Nonetheless, though all-arounds and superiors never materialized for Rusty, he did capitalize on another honor just as significant. "In the first nine shows, I made Char Ann a youth champion," Rusty noted.

Rusty competed with Char Ann in halter, western riding, reining, western pleasure, western



Being the roper he is, Rusty displays some of his trick rope talents.

horsemanship, showmanship, and hunt seat. From all of those events, the youth admitted that hunt seat was the most difficult for him.

"When I rode English, I had about 10 people stationed around the outside of the arena. Whenever the judge called for a trot, they would watch to see if I got on the right diagonal. That was the hardest thing — I could never tell which leg was coming up and down. If the judge was watching me when I took off, more often than not, I would start on

the wrong leg and he'd eliminate me from the standings. Luckily, they didn't have English equitation when I was riding hunt seat. I would have never placed."

Rusty's parents also showed Char Ann, his mom riding in pleasure and his dad leading at halter. Not only did the mare receive superiors in those events, but she also became an AQHA Champion.

Although Char Ann might have, for the most part, performed as a finely-tuned champion, she did manage to flare up one time and literally show the judge the best view of her hindquarters. "I was in a showmanship class, and when it was my turn to let the judge see my horse, I proceeded to walk toward him," Rusty explained. "I set the mare up, turned her around and began to trot back to the line. All of a sudden, the first thing I knew, Char Ann was flying sideways, the judge's clipboard was laying about 10 feet away and he stood there somewhat startled. Needless to say, I didn't place."

Char Ann, of course, had more good days than she did bad, and by the time the 1974 AJQHA Finals rolled around, she and Rusty had qualified in six different events. "We didn't let Rusty compete in all of them," his mom said, "We thought he was a little too young at the time."

Rusty was not able to come home with any ribbons that year; he instead carried away big ideas. "Nick Arismendi was the AJQHA President then and he really impressed me. When I saw him at all of the meetings, I thought to myself, 'How neat it would be to stand up there and talk to everyone and all that.'"

The youngster returned to his state with a dream of someday standing behind that podium and addressing the entire AJQHA delegation. The hopes of becoming an AJQHA President were, Rusty thought, not unrealistic.

A few changes were occurring in Rusty's attitude, and the biggest seemed to be his reluctance to ride in pleasure and show at halter. He was getting pretty much "burnt out" and tired of the monotony of it all.

Then it happened. Rusty found a new liking for the feel of a stiff rope and began swinging loops around big horns. "Duane and Jackie Fulps, who live in Oregon, gave me some pointers. I started roping off the ground at a bale of hay. Then I

THE QUARTER HORSE JOURNAL

mounted a plastic set of steer horns on the hay and again began practicing." His mom remarked, "Roping seemed to be the big excitement around the house at that time."

For two years, Rusty never roped live cattle due to the fact that he didn't have any. "Our horseshoer knew I liked to rope and he asked me to come watch him rope calves at the arena in Wenatchee. He had this old bay gelding named Sizzler George and we ended up buying him."

The next year, '76, Sizzler had turned 17 and Rusty continued to rope his way to the AJQHA Finals. Weighing only 100 pounds, Rusty said, "It was a wrestling match between me and this big calf most of the time. In calf roping, I'd catch but the hard part was getting the thing tied down. Instead of just trying to win, I'd see if I could just get the calf tied in 60 seconds." His mother added, "At the Finals I remember watching Rusty wrestle this calf down and when he finally did it, the fans started clapping."

During '76, the Martins also showed a mare they had bought from Jerald Freeman of Oklahoma. "Iza Diamond Dude was mainly a halter horse but she did earn some western pleasure and hunt seat points. We sold her that next year," Pat explained.

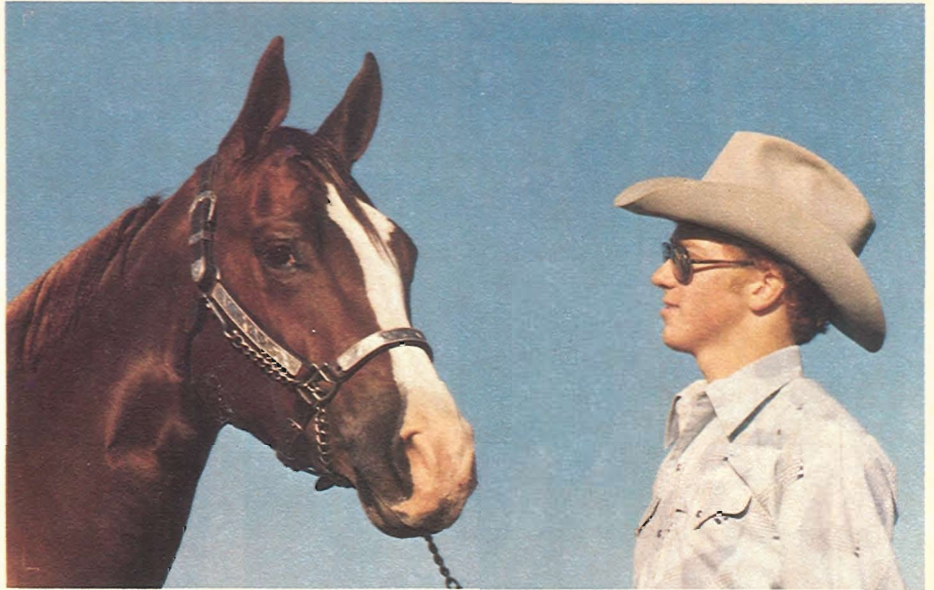
Rusty left the responsibility of the halter and pleasure horses to his parents and brother, and he continued to rope. At the 1977 Finals, he returned with Sizzler for the last time. "Sizzler was getting slow and I had bought a horse named Pale Face Beaver to replace him."

Pale Face Beaver, nicknamed Bud after his favorite beverage, had a liking for beer. "All the ropers around here would give him beer instead of water. He'll drink it right out of the can." And Rusty added, "He's a faster guzzler than any cowboy around."

Aside from Bud's liking for beer, he also enjoys chasing cattle. "When I took him to the Finals in 1978, we just missed placing in the top 10 in heading," Rusty pointed out. "However, we did place seventh in breakaway roping."

Rusty had finally won a national award and his happiness was magnified even more when he also captured another title. "Tom St. Hilaire, who was the AJQHA Reporter at the time, was trying to find someone to run for an office. He asked me, and I told him okay. So, I went out and bought a new suit and

JANUARY 1981



At the 1980 AJQHA World Championship, Krisie Three and Rusty placed third in two-year-old mares.



Rusty enjoys a ride through the apple orchard.



Pat and Mike Martin are very supportive of both their sons' activities with horses.



At the 1979 AJQHA World Championship Show, Rusty took the honors of reserve world champion three-year-old mare with Krisie Dude.



At the 1980 AJQHA World Championship Show, Shaun, Rusty's younger brother, showed the gelding Diamonds Mr Sparkle.



Rusty releases his rope in perfect style and manages to lay the loop around the steer's horns.

poster boards. I sat down and wrote a speech, gave it that night and was elected AJQHA Treasurer."

Even though Rusty had become an active participant, as well as an officer, in AJQHA, he also found time to be involved in high school activities. "I was in FFA for two years and won the horse proficiency award both times. I was a chapter farmer and on their parliamentary procedure team."

Rusty was also on the high school bowling team and a member of the National Honor Society. And in the midst of all that, he even managed to play football, basketball, baseball and soccer. "This whole valley is sports oriented. In my high school, if you weren't into sports you were considered a 'nothing.' A lot of these small schools have calf ropers and rough stock riders who are also active in football or basketball. There are more cowboys up here and it's a little more country. I guess the big thing at school was to carry a can of Copenhagen in your back pocket."

Although Rusty rodeoed in high school and went to the state finals a few times, no one from his town was into showing horses competitively like he was. "Most of the kids thought it was neater to drive around in a hot car and play football than to go to horse shows."

Rusty graduated early and enrolled at Wenatchee Valley College for a

quarter. Combining college courses with his duties of treasurer, the youth exhibitor was able to continue showing horses in '79 and attend the AJQHA World Show for the fifth time. "At the Finals, I decided to go ahead and run for the presidency; I ended up as First Vice President."

However, the disappointment of not becoming the new president was softened a little with his tremendous victories in the final performances that year. "I placed sixth in breakaway roping and third in heeling with Bud, and won reserve world champion three-year-old mare with Krisie Dude." Krisie also brought home another award later in the year — high-point youth mare for the state of Washington.

The youngster's show career slowed down a bit when he decided to attend college at Washington State University. "I enjoyed getting away from home for a year and being on my own," he said. Though the activities of the fraternity were a lot of fun, the dream of becoming the next AJQHA President still lingered in Rusty's mind.

This was his last year in youth; he'd give it one last try. "Ken Smith, the past president of our state association, supported me, as did my parents and friends. My grandad printed my brochures, and a lot of my friends passed them out." Rusty continued, "When I gave my speech



At a young age, Rusty made Char Ann Tivio a youth champion.



As the sun peeks over a nearby hill, the Martins awake to the sounds of the country.



Rusty's dad, Mike, owns the Chevrolet dealership in downtown Brewster.



Eight pups make their way to the feeding bowl as Rusty excites them with dinner.

that night, I made it brief and to the point. I let the members know that I really wanted the position."

After the election, Rusty had accomplished his goal. He was the new 1981 AJQHA President. But his trip to the Finals wasn't yet over; he still had to show.

"I once again qualified my horse in roping, in addition to qualifying a new mare, Krisie Three, who was a half sister to the mare I showed the year before, in halter. My brother was also showing a gelding,

JANUARY 1981

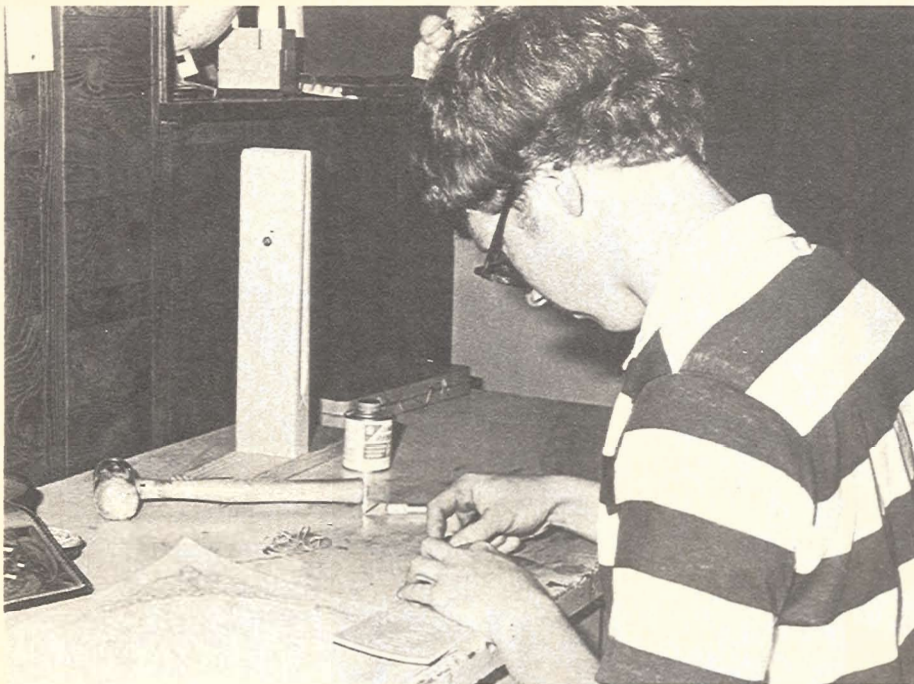
Diamonds Mr Sparkle, a full brother to the 1979 Superhorse."

When it came time for Rusty to rope, he wanted to show the fans just how fast he could lay his loop. "It was the day after the election and I was all hyped up. It just so happened that when I caught my calf, he turned back toward me and the rope caught around my foot as I was stepping off. It was a disaster, to say the least. I fell, my horse fell, and I was in a wreck. Then the rope slacked off and I managed to get loose and go

ahead and tie the calf."

Even though the new president had a tough go in the roping, he managed not to walk away empty handed. Rusty placed third with Krisie Three in two-year-old mares and received a lettered blanket.

The next time Rusty returns to the AJQHA World Championship Show, it will be to relinquish his title to another youth member. Before that time approaches, he admits, "I've got a lot of planning and things to accomplish while I'm serving as



"I enjoy leatherworking, and in my spare time I will make billfolds, belts and other items."



One of Rusty's responsibilities at home is to tend to the apple orchard. Hoeing around the trees is customary during the winter so the mice will not nest in the grass and feed on the bark.

president."

Lack of correspondence in an organization oftentimes results in lack of accomplishment. Rusty plans to communicate both directly and indirectly to the states and their officers in his region. "I want to inform them of what is going on and what we can do to improve the youth organization as a whole. The members need to be able to discuss ideas and send those suggestions to the AJQHA officers.

"Another idea along this line," Rusty explains, "is to start a newsletter. We're going to talk more about that at the AQHA Convention, which will be in Hawaii in March. There, we'll discuss the possibility of making the AJQHA Judging Contest an actual class. This way, those that place can receive points for their team totals. Such a decision could also generate more interest in the contest itself.

"The youth committee also plans to discuss some other possible rule changes. For instance, in the youth team roping, the rule states that the other roper has to be a youth. I rope and there have been some shows in the Washington area where there might be 12 adult ropers and only one youth roper. If there are no points involved, why penalize the youth who can't find another youth who'll rope with him? Of course, there are other opinions, and that's why we want youth members to speak up."

Not only should youth members try to improve their organization, they should also inform those non-members about AJQHA. "I'd like to continue to try and increase the membership," Rusty said. "Last year, some states had a substantial number of new members, and then others lost some. The AJQHA has a total of approximately 5,400 youths; I'd like to see that number multiply.

"The youth clinics have helped in informing 4-H, FFA and other kids about our organization. These kids have had the chance to see demonstrations about showmanship, horsemanship and several other

youth classes. They can learn from these trainers, and then apply those tactics at home.

"I do feel like some of the lectures have been above some of the participants' heads, and instructors should be chosen who can put things on the level of a 15- or 16-year-old.

"The clinics have also given youngsters the chance to learn about the programs available in AJQHA. There are youth awards such as superiors and supremes, and the scholarship program is extremely beneficial to those who qualify for them."

As President, Rusty has a big job ahead of him. He must come up with ideas, discuss them with others and promote the Association for which he represents. At home, his responsibilities are also numerous.

"On our 25 acres, we have a hay field and an orchard. My brother and I do most of the work and my dad is what you might call the overseer. Taking care of the apple trees takes up a lot of time," Rusty explained. "We've got to put spreaders in all of the trees, pick the apples so that the trees will grow, thin the trees, spray them and turn the irrigation on. We have about 2,000 young trees and it will be about two more years before they give us our first big crop. But you have to do all of the preliminary work so as to have a profitable yield."

Taking care of the horses is another time-consuming project. "I'm planning to start a couple of new horses this year in roping. I still plan to take Bud, who is now 14, to some ropings around the area. We've got a few young horses in the barn, and two are from the same bloodlines as the mares I showed at Tulsa. Jerald Freeman keeps supplying us with these Krisie horses since we've done well with them. He is also training the gelding Shaun showed at Tulsa for pleasure and other riding events. Shaun, on the other hand, has just recently started a new project of raising sheep, and he'll probably put horses aside for awhile."

Rusty has quite a few ideas to carry out this year, and some of those seem to continue on into the more-distant future. "It doesn't hurt to think ahead and set your goals high.

"You know, I wouldn't mind it a bit if someday I could become the AQHA President."

Mike and Pat looked at their son with some doubt, but this time, they didn't laugh. □