

Skating To The Top

BY LOU ANN GOOD

LANDISVILLE — When Carol Lee Shirk first moved to the Lancaster County, she accompanied her husband Glen Shirk, the county extension dairy agent, to a 4-H roller skating party. Since Carol had never skated before, Glen, a more experienced skater, wasn't especially thrilled with accompanying his wife on skates. Five years later, he still doesn't like to skate with Carol. But his reasons have changed, for Carol now skates circles around him.

This novice turned pro has twice won the regional figure roller skating title, which propelled her into national competition. She has placed seventh in national compet-

ition, and she doesn't plan to retire until she has captured the number one spot.

Carol claims she doesn't have a natural knack for skating. What she does possess is determination—lots of it. "I've worked a lot of hours," Carol said. "A lot of the younger kids can't understand my dedication," she said as she recalls her commitment to classes both in dance steps and in figure skating. But Carol knew that since she has had a late start compared to the average competitive skater who begins practicing in childhood, she had a lot of catching up to do.

Actually, when Carol began to take classes, she didn't foresee that

it would become her one consuming interest. "Everything just sort of happened," she says. During one of the teaching sessions, Herven Mann, an experienced dance skater, wandered over and joined Carol in a dance. Her teacher and the audience were enthralled and despite Carol's protests of inadequacy, both her instructor and dance partner propelled her into perfecting her dance skating and later solo figure skating.

Carol confesses to being extremely shy. She said, "My mother still can't believe that I skate in front of crowds, because I've always been so timid."

Although she captivates audiences with her intricate dance steps, the shyness has not left her. "I still get scared," Carol admits. "Just let me see a judge with a pencil and I'm terrified. It's as scary as speaking before a crowd. You try to block everyone else out and try to remember all you've been taught, but sometimes nerves just take over and you make mistakes." Carol doesn't believe skating in front of judges will ever get easier for her.

But if, Carol is scared, she generally hides it well and carries out her routines with dazzling skill. "It seemed like a long time before I got any medals," Carol recalled. "I'll never forget the first time—I felt terrific." Each medal since then advances her another step.

Carol's success has surprised



Carol Lee Shirk and her dancing partner Herven Mann dominate the roller skating competition in Maryland, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.



From novice to roller skating champion in five years, Carol Lee Shirk has won more trophies and ribbons than she can count. Last year, she placed seventh in national competition.



Skating divisions are divided into groups by age. When Carol started she needed to skate against people who had been skating since childhood. This meant she needed to work extra hard to catch up and surpass them to win her seventh place national standing.



Four large scrapbooks track Carol Lee Shirk's roller skating achievements.

even her. She said, "I didn't expect it at all." She paused then added, "Sometimes I wonder how far I could have gone if I had started skating when I was a kid. It's so much easier for kids to skate. They don't fear falling and they don't have as far to fall."

Carol admits that her 38 years limit her. There are some competitions that she can't enter due to her age. Nonetheless, when her skating experience is compared with the average skater, one realizes what an amazing record she holds.

Her skating highlight has been making it to the nationals. "I never thought I'd see that," Carol admits, the thrill of it still lights her face.

Carol refers to much of her life as before and after. Before skating she worked in a Chiropractic's office and sold her handicrafts such as wood burning at craft shows. But after six months of

skating, Carol took the plunge, quit her job and put her efforts into perfecting her skating skills.

Seldom has Carol found skating frustrating. She did hit a low point at the 1986 National competition when she skated "a bad figure." She explained, "I had put a lot of hard work into it, hoping to do my best." After the disappointing event, Carol took three months off because "I needed a break."

When she started skating again, it took her several months to regain her former skill. "It's challenging," she said. "I'm constantly learning more advanced dances."

During competition, Carol seldom watches other skaters. "You can pick up bad habits by watching and we each have our own unique style. Pros teach differently." It's that difference, Carol believes, that

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