

Md. Dairy Judging Members Worthy Of Competition

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Maryland Correspondent
WESTMINSTER, Md.—What's it like to be the proverbial rose among the thorns?

Two young women from Carroll County are getting a real world lesson this fall in being the beauties among the "beasts."

The bovines at the World Dairy Expo in Madison don't speak their language and the men they're traveling with don't always know what to make of them, but Marie Speak of Taneytown and Jessica Fritz of New Windsor said being the only women on Maryland's two top dairy judging teams is no big deal.

When they're in the ring circling cows so they can place them, it doesn't matter that they're the lone women on their teams—and it better not matter to their teammates either, they said.

Marie, daughter of John and

Bonnie Speak, is a junior at the University of Maryland. She previously was a member of the state's 4-H judging team and represented Maryland at international competition in Europe a few years ago.

Jessica, a senior at Francis Scott Key High School, is the daughter of Daniel and Sharon Fritz. She represented Maryland 4-H at competition in Louisville, Ky. last year.

Jessica was the only woman on that team also. She and Mark Schnebly of Washington County returned to this year's Madison team.

Though having one woman on a team can pose dilemmas—the expense of having one team member in a hotel room, and the worry of isolation—Dr. Lee Majeski, Maryland's dairy judging coach, said he chooses his team members according to how well they score

in competition.

Marie and Jessica have proven themselves skilled members of their respective teams, Majeski said. Their status as women may come in to play logistically, but it does not matter in the ring, he said.

Marie previously judged with Mark Iager in European competition.

"We've been judging together so long that it really doesn't make a difference" that she's a woman, she said, with a laugh.

The camaraderie among the team members surpasses the differences between them, they said at a recent practice session.

This year, the teams have spent more time coaching and encouraging their "rookie" members, Chris Seymour and Bobby Fogle. Both men are new to dairy judging. Chris is a former Maryland livestock judging winner. Bobby's

only experience in the ring is poultry judging—a far cry from judging cows.

With competition fast upon them—team members have no time or interest in worrying whether men are better judges than women, they said.

"This is extremely important to me. It's the last contest we're going to judge in like this and we're trying to uphold the reputation of Maryland," Marie said.

"But you can't stress out," cautioned Sean Johnson of Howard County, speaking as much to himself as the rest of the team. "Because that's when you make mistakes," he said.

Judging has taught each of them to look beyond what's close at hand and draw from within themselves, the team members said.

"You have to go out and do the best you can," said Sean.

"Without worrying about the

other team," finished Marie.

It's a mantra they all repeat often.

The Maryland 4-H team placed 4th in the oral reasons contest at Harrisburg and 9th overall. Chris Seymour of Howard County was first in oral reasons and 4th overall in individual competition.

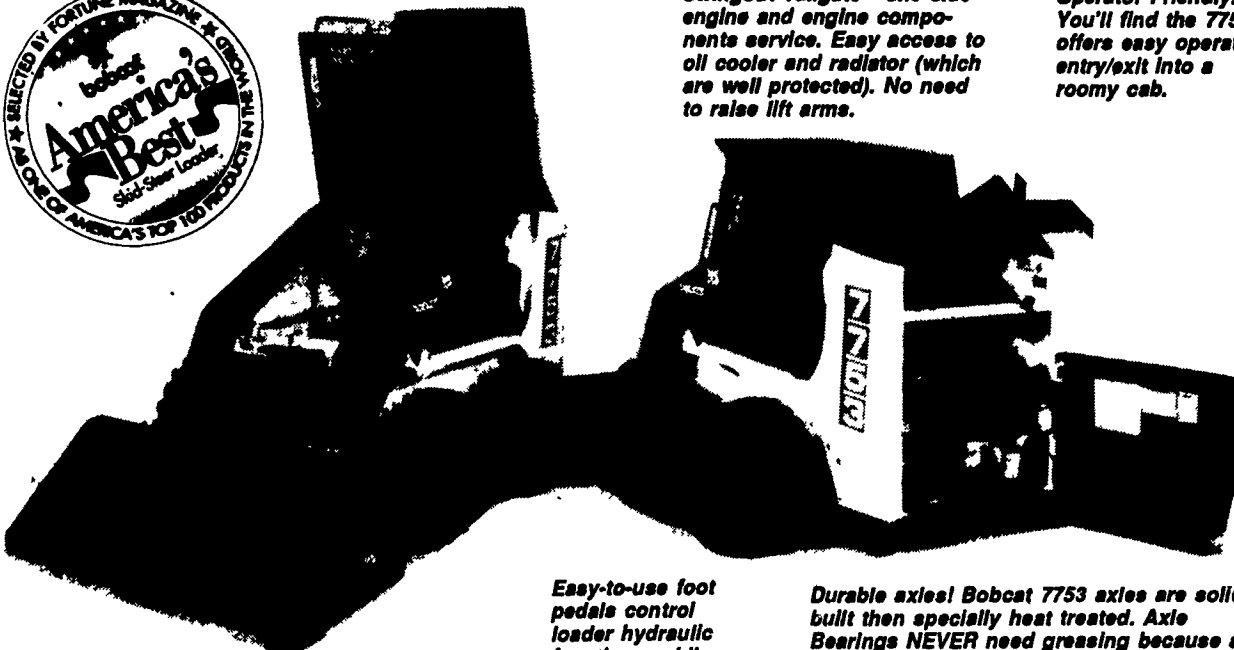
The University of Maryland team took second place in oral reasons, losing first place to Cornell University by only two points, according to Maryland coach Katharine Knowlton. The team placed sixth overall. Marie Speak placed 4th in reasons and Sean Johnson was seventh. Mark Iager was 12th individual overall.

Knowlton said while the performance wasn't as high as team members had hoped, they are preparing even harder for Madison.

And they're all equally confident things will improve, she said.

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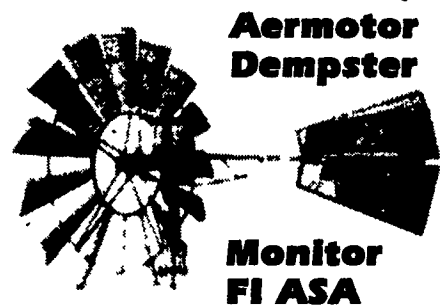
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