



Arena Lights

Joyce Whitis

December 5th 2007

Kaila Mussell Saddle Bronc Rider Chooses Stephenville

She's dead serious about finishing anything that she starts and Kaila Mussell decided before she was twenty-one that she was going to compete in rodeos in the same arenas as the men.

"I've always enjoyed a challenge," the pretty dark-haired Canadian transplant said. "My dad, Jack Mussell competed in rodeos, riding Saddle bronc and Bulls, my mom was a rodeo queen and now enters barrel riding events. My sister also rides in barrel racing and my brother, CEJ pursues Saddle bronc riding. Only my brother, Broncyn failed to take an interest in rodeo and is studying medicine."

Kaila rode steers as a youngster and competed in barrel racing but at 16 decided to try something a little more challenging, trick-riding. During the next five years she performed at Pro Rodeos including the Cloverdale Rodeo, the Pacific National Exhibition and the Calgary Stampede.

By the time she had her 21st birthday, she was ready for yet another challenge. "I decided that I wanted to compete in Saddle bronc riding, an event considered too dangerous for women," she said. "There is a possibility that your foot can get hung up in the stirrups causing severe injury and even death. Women have competed in a moderated form of Bareback riding and Bull riding in women's rodeo associations and I decided that I wanted to take on the challenge presented by staying on a Saddle bronc for eight seconds."

In order to follow her dream, Kaila would have to compete in rodeo arenas with the men. In 2000 she verified that there is no rule preventing women from competing in rough stock events so she started competing in the BCRA (British Columbia Rodeo Association) a local amateur rodeo association. She became the first woman to ever place at a PRCA rodeo on April 5, 2002 in Pineville, Oregon and on July 20 of that same year she made further history by winning a professional rodeo in Saddle bronc riding at Enumclaw, Washington.

"In order to compete in more rodeos, I needed to get out of Canada," Kaila said. "Basically the rodeo season up there goes from April to October and the rodeos are miles and miles apart so travel is a big expense."

On March 9, 2003, the 25 year old, placed 3rd at a rodeo in Florida and filled her card to become the First Professional Female Saddle Bronc Rider in rodeo history. But the rides didn't come without injuries. She's had a dislocated shoulder twice, a torn ACL and other scrapes and tears and has been forced to give up competition for awhile, but she's all mended now and has made plans to enter as many rodeos as possible this season. Last weekend she competed in a CPRA rodeo in Corsicana, using a new saddle that Wendy Allen of Dublin, professional saddle maker, designed especially for her.

"She really did a great job with this saddle," the dark haired cowgirl said. "I am Native American, part of the Slo lo tribe, Skwah band in Canada and Wendy reflected my heritage with designs on the saddle. It is very special and I feel that it will be a great advantage to me in competition."

Kaila made the decision to come to Stephenville because of the rodeo atmosphere here and the easy access to rodeos. Also she knew some of the rodeo folks who live here. "I met Molly and Turtle Powell in Canada, she said. In fact I have been helping train horses for them for sometime."

Kaila teaches Yogi, kick-boxing, and the use of the machines at Countryside Therapy Group on Washington Street. Her workday begins at 5:00 A.M. Later in the day she becomes a student and is pursuing a degree in Psychology at an on-line university. After that she might be working with horses but always she is very conscious of her physical condition and being ready for the next rodeo. How do the

male rodeo competitors treat this young Indian from Canada who saddles up and rides against them in competition? "They treat me very well and judge me fairly," she said. "Once they see that I am really serious about what I do, they respect that in each other and they treat me the same."

Competing in the Fort Worth rodeo is this Saddle bronc rider's goal next month. This month she plans to spend a few days in Las Vegas at the National Finals Rodeo, watching and learning, always learning everything she can that will help her conquer the next challenge.

Kaila Mussell has her permanent residency in the United States and plans to stay where she is in Erath County. This is a first for rodeo fans here, having a female Saddle bronc rider resident. In fact it is a first anywhere. She will be featured on the cover of The Horseman Magazine in January and will tell the world that she is from Stephenville, Texas, the Cowboy Capital of the World.