

A Horse for Shawn

Perfect horse for a rising star.

By Summer Best.

Meet Shawn Sanders. He is 11 years old and just about as tall as a large pony. He has blue eyes and brown hair. (But they're usually covered up by a cowboy hat.) By all standards, this kid is cute. Really cute. Shawn rides Tyrone several days each week. The Sanders family credits Seminole Feed for keeping this 27-year-old gelding nutritionally sound.

Shawn is also a whiz kid at any rodeo. Goat-tying, heading, heeling, calf roping, breakaway roping, no worries, he can do it all. In 2004, Shawn was a Florida Junior Rodeo finalist in team roping, an AQHYA World Championship Show finalist in heeling, and in October 2004, a Florida Junior Rodeo team roping champion.

Shawn is cute and he's good. But as any serious cowboy will tell you, you gotta have a good horse to win at the rodeos. Turns out, Shawn has the best horse in the world.

Meet Tyrone

Eight years ago, Shawn's mom and dad, Staci and Stoney, got a phone call from the little town of Arp, Texas. It was Uncle Rowdy, and he had big news. Said he had a horse for Shawn. It seemed a bit untimely: Shawn was 3 years old at the time. Both Staci and Stoney are experienced ropers, and they were skeptical.

"They called me and said they had a horse for us, and I had never seen the horse before," Staci says. "I was like, 'I'm going to put my baby on this?'"

Tyrone goes in the same bit everyday- a custom bit with his name imprinted on the side.

Flashy J Bars, or "Tyrone," was the horse's name. He was a red dun gelding with a sweet-looking attitude and a history of being dependable as a rope horse. For such a little kid, though, he was a big horse, at least 15.2 and with a thick body. Tyrone was a dependable rope horse, but they felt he was getting older and was ready to be a kids' horse.

"They promised that Tyrone would not hurt Shawn," Staci remembers. "So we brought Tyrone all the way from Texas to Florida, and he's been the best horse ever for Shawn. He is such a blessing to our family."

The red dun taught his little rider how to stay on, how to jump off and how

to hold on tight. He also taught Shawn some real horsemanship.

“One day, Shawn was 4 years old and he got to showing off,” Staci recalls. “He was wearing spurs and was using them a little too much. Tyrone bucked him off. But you should see the way he bucked him off. It’s like, he sort of bucks, then Shawn is slooowly coming off the side, and Tyrone’s like, doing everything he can to make sure Shawn doesn’t get hurt.”
Shawn Sanders with his mom, Staci Sanders.

The same year, Staci watched her son carefully leading Tyrone in the pasture. The big gelding was ambling along nonchalantly when Shawn tripped and fell. Staci caught her breath.

“I was watching, and it was one of those moments when you just don’t know what’s going to happen next – he was so close to stepping on Shawn,” she says.

The red dun immediately stopped, carefully to avoid stepping on his little master.

“He’s just like that. He’s so interested in doing the right thing,” she says. “And he loves his job. If you even crack the door of the horse trailer and he thinks you’re going to leave him, he’s right there, making sure there’s a place for him.”

Tyrone had never received an AQHA point until Shawn put one on him two years ago. Then, in 2004, the team racked up enough points to qualify for the AQHYA World Championship Show in breakaway roping, calf roping, heading and heeling. Bringing home a finalist ribbon in heeling was quite an accomplishment – out of 83 entries, he placed 15th overall.

Senior Moment

Tyrone is 27 years old. In people years, that’s like being 80 and still feeling well enough to run 6 miles every few days.

You’d never guess his age if no one told you. He is fat, yet toned, shiny and happy. The picture of health. Other than one joint supplement, Tyrone thrives solely on a diet of quality hay and Seminole Feed products. Flashy J Bars, or "Tyrone", thrives on a diet of Seminole Senior Formula. The 27-year-old is shiny, sound and still going strong. “We gave him (Seminole) Blue Ribbon 10, just like the rest of our geldings, until two years ago,” Staci says. “At age 25, Tyrone’s teeth were not what they used to be, so it was recommended that we try him on Seminole Senior Formula. Now he maintains on Seminole Senior, alfalfa cubes and a supplement. The long trailer rides and endless hours

practicing don't seem to affect him at all."

The more the Sanders family learns about Tyrone, the more interesting the horse becomes. Apparently, Tyrone's original owner was killed in a tragic car accident, so when Tyrone was finally sold to Shawn's family members in Texas, he was 8 years old and had never been saddled.

"Maybe that's why he's so young-acting!" Staci says. "It's like he never had to work too hard for the first eight years of his life."

The Sanders family plans to keep the gelding athletic and healthy for as long as possible, although they have found another horse for Shawn to work with – a 21-year-old gelding who thrives on Seminole Blue Ribbon 10. But the newer gelding is not a replacement for Tyrone, they say. Not anytime soon. Tyrone is a tough guy – he doesn't like to stay in his stall and spends as much time outside as possible. He also loves the rain and will stand right out in it.

Shawn, who enjoys hunting and fishing and is an honor student at St. John Lutheran, takes Tyrone for a ride several times a week, roping about twice each week. When Tyrone rides out into the pasture of cows, the gelding's ears zoom forward, focusing on his job.

Shawn has found the perfect horse with Flashy J Bars, also known as Tyrone. Shawn is a quiet cowboy, but he knows his horse. He also knows how to take care of the big gelding. Shawn's dad, Stoney, feeds Tyrone and the rest of the horses in the mornings, and Shawn helps feed at night. Shawn is still kind of small to tack up his horse all by himself, but that day isn't too far down the road.

Tyrone is not a picky horse. He goes in the same bit every ride – a custom bit with his name clearly spelled out on the shank. He doesn't ask for a blanket or a stall ball or for special treats. No need to lunge him before you ride him. If he doesn't get his whiskers trimmed, that's O.K. He doesn't really ask for much.

At this point, all Tyrone wants is to keep his little boy happy.

Baseball Boy

As if roping wasn't enough talent for one boy, Shawn Sanders is a top-notch baseball player, too. He plays pitcher and catcher for the Marion Mob, and 11-and-under travel baseball team. As of March 23, the team was ranked third in Florida in its division.

The Sanders family stays busy running back and forth between roping events and baseball events, but they're not complaining. Shawn's dad, Stoney, is a coach for the team, and Staci is a supportive mom.

"We're part of a family with our baseball kids and with the rodeo group," Staci says. "All our kids are close-knit. They're great."

Stoney competes at professional rodeos, and he also played college baseball in New Mexico, so he connects with Shawn in each sport.