

LUIS EARNS HIGH MARKS

By Bonnie Wheatley
Photos by Primo Morales

Very Lucky N Smart carries LaRae Luis to the High School Rodeo Invitational Championship.

When the 2016 National High School Finals Rodeo (NHSFR) concluded July 23 in Gillette, Wyoming, the top Reined Cow Horse short go qualifiers found themselves eligible for another prestigious finals—the High School Rodeo Invitational hosted by the NRCHA during its Celebration of Champions. When the field of 10 High School Rodeo Invitational reined cow horse competitors faced off on Saturday, February 18, 2017 in John Justin Arena, it was LaRae Luis, Wynnewood, Oklahoma, who topped the class.

Riding the 2010 sorrel gelding Very Lucky N Smart (Very Smart Remedy x Gunna Be Lucky x Gunna Smoke), owned by ML Training LLC and Adam Rhodes, Luis was rock solid for a 145 in the reined work and 143.5 on the cow. Her cumulative score of 288.5 edged Clay Kinnison riding the 2011 gray mare RuGonnaKissMeOrNot (Twice As Shiney x Megas Macy Grey x Marthas Mega Jac), owned by Brian and Andrea Kinnison,



High School Rodeo Invitational Champion LaRae Luis was awarded her Bob's Custom Trophy Saddle during the World's Greatest Horseman finals by Chris Weaver and John McClure.



High School Rodeo Invitational Champions LaRae Luis and Very Lucky N Smart.

with a 286. Decorated all-around cowgirl and 2016 National High School Rodeo Reined Cow Horse Champion Jayde Atkins, Broken Bow, Nebraska, rounded out the top three with a 285.5 riding the 2003 sorrel gelding Sonitas Last Dual (Dualin Jewels x Sonitas Ann x Sonitas Last) owned by J.B. Atkins.

"I've always wanted to be here," was Luis' emotional response when asked how it felt to achieve the win riding the horse she fondly calls George. "My dad bought him a year ago and I've just been riding him since then...He really came though for me; he was there. We're like a team. He's not like any other horse I've ever seen before. He's got the biggest heart and he tries so hard."

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The 15-year-old sophomore at Epic Charter School in Wynnewood also competes in the NHSRA in cutting, barrel racing, pole bending, breakaway and team roping, but says reined cow horse is her favorite.

"I think it's great for your horsemanship and teaches you a lot of great skills," she said. "My favorite event is the reined cow horse because I've grown up doing

it. It challenges me every day to be better and work harder for it."

Luis is proud to continue a legacy of success in the high school rodeo and reined cow horse ranks, following her dad Mark Luis' path.

"My dad made it to nationals and it's something I would love to carry on and try and win because my dad is my hero, I want to try and get there just like he did," she said.

Of her winning run, Luis says the goal was to stay smooth.

"I knew I needed to go in there and be solid and have fun," she said. "My cow was a little tough so I was trying to read him the best I could and stay in the right spots and when it was time to turn, go turn him. I gave it my all and tried my hardest."

Since a shorter reining pattern is the norm at regular season high school rodeo reined cow horse events, Luis says she practiced the world show pattern at home to prepare.

She thanked her parents Mark and Shari Luis for their support, as well as her sponsors Resistol Hats, Cactus Saddlery, Cactus Ropes, Cactus Gear and Rodeo Quincy.

Working closely with the NRCHA, the National High School Rodeo Association added reined cow horse to its event lineup in 2014 as an optional event and has experienced steady growth in entry numbers with each passing rodeo season. For more information on the high school rodeo program, rules, clinics and more, visit nrcha.com/nhsra-reined-cow-horse.