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Performing to perfection

By Noelle Chun
Advertiser Staff Writer

Two fingers, two legs.
That is the so-called steering wheel used to guide a 1,200-pound horse flawlessly through its dressage movements.

A slight twitch of the reins, a mere slip by the rider, and hours of training for five minutes of perfection is lost.

It is intense. It is grueling. And it is supposed to look effortless.

It is not.

And yet, for Tricia Silva and Breezy Burgoon, performing flawlessly in dressage competition was the easy part in advancing to the North American Young Rider Championship in Burmont, Quebec.

The championship, to be held Aug. 20-24, is a competition in which riders perform choreographed movements and sequences with their horses.

It may look easy — that's part of the sport's allure — but the precision needed to make the horse trot, serpentine or stop on a mere touch can take years to perfect.

The Quebec event is one of the most prestigious dressage competitions in North America, third only to the Olympics and Pan Am Games. Young Rider is an international competition for competitors 16 to 21 years old.

It's unusual to have two riders from Hawai'i qualify for the event. Then again, there's nothing typical about the way Burgoon and Silva fought through obstacles to make their championship dreams a reality.

They had to compete in an individual test, a team test and a musical freestyle in which the rider creates his or her own choreography. Judges evaluate the grace and beauty of the movements, and how well the rider harmonizes with the horse.

Until Burgoon, 18, and Silva, 20, came along, local competitions didn't meet the requirements that would make riders eligible for the North American Young Rider Championship. Two judges are required for a qualifying show — and Hawai'i only had one until trainer Linda Hosoi persuaded the state board to spend the money and find another judge for three tournaments.

Silva, a UH-Manoa student, and Burgoon, a graduate of Kalaheo High School, faced 38 other Hawai'i competitors to make it to the championship.

But that was only part of the challenge.



Tricia Silva, left, and Breezy Burgoon have qualified for the North American Young Rider Championship in Quebec.
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The U.S. Equestrian Federation, which hosts and regulates the events, usually has nine divisions with qualifying quotas from each. Hawai'i equestrians typically face California and Nevada riders to compete for four qualifying spots to the championship. In the past, that's made qualifying difficult for Hawai'i's competitors because the sport is particularly popular in California, where some riders have been known to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase top-quality, already-trained horses.

Buying trained horses was out of the question for Silva and Burgoon. Instead, they appealed to the national office to grant Hawai'i its own qualifying event.

The national office agreed, granting Hawai'i four spots in the championship, provided they met a minimum score of 60 percent.

Silva and Burgoon each scored 61 percent. They were the only local equestrians to make the cutoff.

The struggle to get to the championship was daunting from other perspectives, too.

Dressage is an expensive sport. Since neither Silva or Burgoon had money to pay for the training required, they worked for their trainers in exchange for extra lessons.

Burgoon's mom, a massage therapist and landscaper, even gave the trainers massages in exchange for her daughter's lessons.

"I basically had to train (my horse) myself," Silva said. "My trainer would show me what to do, and I did it during the week when I didn't have lessons."

Silva's situation proved particularly challenging: At 16, she was given WinSome Appeal, a horse that was both untrained and old.

"To place a horse like mine at the caliber of competition it's at is like taking a second-grader and sticking him in fourth grade," Silva said.

Silva remembers one of her first experiences riding WinSome Appeal.

At the time, the horse ignored the bit, heading into cars, walls or posts — anywhere to escape her rider's demands.

During one riding session, WinSome Approval burst straight through a hedge surrounding the arena.

"All I remember is I was suddenly on the outside of the hedge instead of the inside," Silva recalled.

Within Hawai'i's small equestrian community, skepticism about Burgoon and Silva's chances reached the competitors' ears quickly: They were young, and some doubted the horses' ability to compete at a championship level.

But Silva continued to ride — and score well — with her horse.

Burgoon and her horse, Wishes Do Come True, have overcome the obstacles with equal success.

"As the (naysayers) came to our shows and saw that we really were good, they started to be less skeptical," Burgoon said.

Silva attributes their determination to Hosoi. "From day one, she said, 'Don't listen to them. You guys can do it.' We wouldn't have even thought that we could do it without her."

• **Party for riders Burgoon and Silva's first fund-raiser to pay for their trip to the North American Young Riders championship will be a pupu party.**

5-8 p.m. Sunday

The evening will include a silent auction, prizes and entertainment.

Donations also will be accepted.

For location and more information, call 741-4941.

One thing is sure: Success or no success, the girls love their horses. Burgoon has been riding since she was 9; Silva has been riding since age 7.

"Actually, I have to admit my parents lied to me," Silva said. "I've been in love with horses since I was little, and my dad said he wouldn't let me start riding until my feet touched the stirrups."

But the 6-year-old Silva found out stirrups were adjustable when she attended a birthday party on a horse trail.

"He felt so bad about it that he finally let me take lessons," Silva said. "From day one, when I went to my first lesson, my mom knew I would not get off that horse."

It's been a long trip, but the toughest ride appears over for Silva and Burgoon — they're in the championship.

"It's going to be so great because we're setting a path for the future," Burgoon said. "We're saying to kids, 'Look, we can do this.' "

An advertisement banner for Christian Louboutin shoes. On the left, there are four high-heeled shoes: a blue one, a nude one, a leopard print one, and a black one. In the center, there is a circular logo with the text "open sky". To the right of the logo, the text reads "WIN 6 pairs of Christian Louboutins." in a mix of black and red fonts. Further right is a black button with the text "Enter Now" in white. On the far right, there are two more shoes: a red high-heeled shoe and a black loafer shoe. A small blue and white icon is in the top right corner of the banner.

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