

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

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Shining in Stephenville

Trheavensilluminated put on a dazzling performance with Molli Montgomery in the saddle to win the first annual Lone Star Shootout Futurity in Stephenville, Texas, from January 20–23.

inaugural lone Star Shootout Futurity champions Molli Montgomery and Trheavensilluminated won the first round in 15.339, placed second in the second round with a 15.325 and won the futurity average en route to total event earnings of \$14,806.

A FRIGID TEXAS COLD FRONT DIDN'T STOP COMPETITORS from showing up in droves to the Lone Star Arena in Stephenville, Texas, for the first annual Lone Star Shootout Barrel Race from January 20–23. Headlined by the \$20,000-added 70 Ranch Performance Horses Futurity, the event also featured a \$5,000-added Derby, a \$10,000-added Open 4D as well as a Youth race, a High Roller 3D race, a second Open race and a Super 5D Weekend Incentive. All totaled across all classes, including side-pots and carryovers, the event drew 3,037 entries and paid out \$278,522.

Anyone competing or in attendance who didn't know better never could have guessed it was the first big event that Jodi Robertson of J&J Productions had ever produced.

"I rodeoed and ran barrels the majority of my life. I was married with a daughter, and I got divorced. I was a stay-at-home mom, so I had to come up with a source of revenue. I started putting on weeknight jackpots in Whitney, Texas, at the cowboy church. I moved back home to Graham, where I put on Graham, and then I had Stephenville," Robertson explained. "Sometimes I did two a week. I've only ever done Tuesday or Thursday night jackpots. I've never done events this large prior to this one. It was quite a stepping stone for my producing capabilities."

Robertson currently produces the Palo Pinto Cowboy Church Tuesday night jackpots in Santo, Texas, as well as a few added-money races during the year.

The idea for the Lone Star Shootout came about in a conversation with futurity champion and professional trainer Danyelle Campbell. Robertson and Campbell reside in the nearby Brock and Millsap communities just outside Weatherford and agreed on the need for a large futurity in this region of Texas. Robertson got to work making it happen, assembling a team of the best of the best in barrel racing production.

"Danyelle encouraged it, and we brainstormed and tossed around ideas. I never imagined it being that big for the first year," Robertson admitted. "Colton Dugan headed up our ground crews. My girls who help me on Tuesdays set barrels, Sky Thornburg, Abigail Davis, Rhyann Brough and Shia Williams, said yes right off the bat. Colton knew [announcer] Lenell Dean, so I got him. I messaged Boaz [Dov Elkes], and he was game to take photos, and X Factor did the video. Gina Graham was my secretary—without her, it wouldn't have happened. Everyone else on the team was great help too, levelheaded and never got flustered."

Robertson says the biggest struggle of going from producing jackpots to putting on a large event was coming up with the added money.

"I tell you what, I hate asking anyone for a dollar, so me having to hunt down sponsors for the added money was the biggest work of it. You could run for your own money, but what's the fun running for your own money?" she said with a laugh. "CJ Lembke with 70 Ranch was awesome and stepped up [to sponsor the futurity]. She didn't bat an eye, and she doesn't even know me. We had great sponsors across the board—without them, these events do not happen, so I can't extend my thanks enough."

She says the most rewarding part about the week was that the event ran efficiently without any major hiccups or setbacks.

"Seeing it run so smooth, and how everybody's so encouraging and

appreciative—you hope and pray everything will go smoothly and that you won't have any issues, and for the most part, we did not," Robertson said. "I totally messed up giving out back numbers for the derby—I re-sorted the draw and my lines got off—so some people got the right back number and others did not, but we just threw them away and ran on with it. But if that was the biggest mistake of the weekend, then it was a successful weekend."

Futurity Champion Molli Montgomery and TRheavensilluminated

TRheavensilluminated is one of those horses—the special ones. As a professional trainer and veteran of the game, Molli Montgomery has ridden more horses than the average barrel racer will in their lifetime. She felt the 4-year-old gelding's talent almost immediately.

"He's been the easiest horse I've ever trained in my life," she said. "I got him the day after Thanksgiving of his 2-year-old year. He wasn't even out of the round pen. That's a really short window, a lot shorter than what I like to work with. To add to it, I'm gone [hauling to futurities] quite a bit in December and January. This horse really came along fast. I still took him slow, but after I got him out of the round pen and had him about two months, I loped the barrels on him. By the second week of loping the barrels, I knew this was a great horse. It was just going to be whether or not I could harness it and control it smoothly enough to clock."

TRheavensilluminated

2018 sorrel gelding, owned by Tracy L Lambert, bred by Harry Thomas

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|------------------------|---|---------------------|---|-------------------|
| JL DASH TA HEAVEN { | { | DASH TA FAME | { | FIRST DOWN DASH |
| | | DYNAS PLAIN SPECIAL | | SUDDEN FAME |
| TRHEAVENSILLUMINATED { | { | MR ILLUMINATOR | { | SPECIAL FEELINS |
| | | TR DOUBLE CASH | | DYNA SNOW |
| TR DASHING BADGER { | { | | { | DICK BADGER |
| | | | | MISS FROSTY CLEGG |
| | { | | { | TEXAS HIGH DASHER |
| | | | | EASY CASH BAR |

[Lone Star Shootout]

So far, Montgomery is succeeding at developing “Cyrus” talent, and it was never more apparent than in chilly Stephenville at the salty Lone Star Shootout Futurity. The pair won the first round and finished second in the second round en route to claiming the futurity championship.

Cyrus set the pace early in the first go with a 15.339, which ultimately held through more than 200 futurity runs to win the round for \$3,733.

“That morning I was No. 28, and it was freezing cold, like 19 degrees. The only thing I told myself was not to weaken going to that first, because you have to run him all the way. If you don’t, he’s so talented that he just comes back. He doesn’t even swap ends, he just turns, which is unbelievable. All I thought was even if you get by, it’s fine,” she said. “He smoked the first; I had to lift my leg leaving it. I even touched him a little too long at the second, but he came back perfect. Running to the third, I swear I couldn’t see anything, because it was so cold and my eyes had so many tears in them. I was like, don’t mess this up—take out a little insurance if you have to. But I really couldn’t see, so that was all him.”

Montgomery knew what she had to do heading into the second round. Even with a few bobbles, Cyrus still clocked a 15.325 to place second for \$3,199, clinching the winning average of 30.664 and \$7,110.

“The second day, I drew up toward the end, which I really don’t like. That’s a lot of pressure to not let get in your mind. I was excited just to be running, because he’s a nice horse. Whatever happens, happens, and I’m always going to give it my best,” Montgomery said. “I sent him to the first, and whenever I asked him to turn, he was right there. I shoved my hand forward, but when you do that, you’ve lost your security blanket because your hand’s forward and you can’t be as fast on the backside. That’s the reason he stepped off is because I had to shove my hand forward, lift my leg and come back at the same time.

photo top to bottom:
riding for owner Debbie Deal, Kelsey Knight jockeyed 2017 mare VF Something in red (Designer red x Fames lil Dasher x Dash Ta Fame) to a 15.318 to win the second go of the 70 ranch performance Horses Futurity, worth \$3,733. With a 15.560 in the first go, they ultimately finished fourth in the average for \$4,063.

2017 gelding im So Sway (Jl Dash Ta Heaven x Smooth My Credit x Cash Not Credit) carried owner and rider Shealynn leach McConnell to a 15.314 to claim the lone Star Shootout Double X Equine-r Barrel Horses Derby title for \$4,233.

The fastest time of the weekend belonged to Nicole Edland and 2015 gelding Fantastic Percy (Fantastic Corona Jr x Newport lily x Stoli), who ran a 15.207 to win the Thursday Warm-Up race for \$578.

That’s a lot going on. He smoked the second, and I probably should have ran harder to the third, but it worked. He’s an amazing horse; he is just special.” Those in-the-moment precise adjustments around the turns on a horse that makes moves so quickly has taken Montgomery some time to nail down with Cyrus.

“It’s taken me a while to get with him, because he is so talented. When you have those talented-type horses, it takes you a while to get your timing down, because they can do things other horses can’t. I’ve known it’s been there, but it took me a while to get my bridle right and get my angles,” she explained. “One of my old interns said I had lightning bolts coming out of my butt, because horses just want to run with me. I very seldom kick—I don’t have to. I’ve been doing this a long time, and I used to think I could tell when a horse was running. And now, I don’t know if I can. I think horses like him that can do it so easily, you don’t realize how fast they’re going.”

It also helps that Montgomery has extensive experience with the JL Dash Ta Heaven bloodline. She’s trained many over the years and earned several of her biggest wins on the back of a JL



Dash Ta Heaven. She won the 2016 Barrel Futurities of America World Championship Futurity on A Dash Ta Glamour, and that same year rode full siblings Feelinthefirewater and Heavenly Firewater to more than \$187,119 in combined futurity year earnings. In 2016, Montgomery won close to \$293,938, and just over \$266,000 of that belonged to those three JL Dash

[Lone Star Shootout]



Ta Heavens, according to EquiStat. She's since ridden several others to success, like 2019 Texas Extreme Futurity winner Heavensfeelin'special and multiple futurity finalist Kindafeelinheavenly.

"I mesh well with the Dash Ta Heavens—they just fit my personality and style. They say that your dogs are reflections of your personality, so maybe that flamboyancy of the Dash Ta Heaven is kind of my personality. We might be a little hard to contain, but if you can contain us, it's good!" Montgomery said with a laugh. JL Dash Ta Heaven is himself a National Finals Rodeo qualifier and earner of more than \$200,000 in the arena. He's now sired close to \$4 million in winners. Combined with the powerful NFR blood of Cyrus's dam TR Dashing Badger, best known as "Dolly," Jill Moody's two-time Women's Professional Rodeo Association Reserve World Champion mare, it's no surprise that Cyrus has the necessary 'it' factor that it takes to win.

"The Dash Ta Heavens are very talented. You can't quite get them to do everything exactly how you want them to, but the talent is there if you know how to control it," said Montgomery, who's earned more than \$800,000 running barrels. "That last half a second is what separates OK horses from great horses. Three-quarter speed means nothing. The last half a second is where winners are. And that bloodline has that



edge. I like that extra athletic ability—they're like a genius, where they have a little of that extra. They tread the fine line of it sometimes being too much. But I'd rather have too much than not enough."

The JL Dash Ta Heaven x Dolly cross has produced Cyrus and his brother Heavens Illuminator, who won \$43,572 his futurity year with Kassie Mowry in 2018. Both geldings are owned by Tracy Lambert, who is now competing on Heavens Illuminator. Montgomery is thankful Lambert understood the process it took to make Cyrus shine.

"We'd been to a couple of futurities, and it wasn't messy, but I felt like it was messy," Montgomery admitted. "You always want to do so good for your owners, and sometimes it doesn't happen right off the bat. I'm thankful she was patient that I was going to find the answer."

Far Left: 2012 mare perrywater Dash (Stratospheric x Fire Waters Free x Fire Water Flit) ran a 15.250 with young rider Skyler Nicholas in the saddle to win the \$5,000-added Youth for \$1,640 and the Signature Equine Hospital High roller \$1,500-added for \$3,650.

Left: Jordan Briggs topped the \$10,000-added Saturday Open with a 15.231 on 2014 gelding Famous lil Jet (Dash Ta Fame x Blazin Black Beauty x Blazin Jetolena), worth \$3,586.

Below: The Otero real Estate \$2,000-added Sunday Open winner Josianne St Cyr won \$1,805 for a 15.245 on board 2015 stallion panther Dash (Down Home Dash x rona Mountain x panther Mountain).

Montgomery says winning the Lone Star Shootout Futurity wasn't just a personal victory for her as a jockey and trainer, but a victory for each one of Cyrus's connections—especially in today's increasingly competitive climate in the futurity industry.

"Bo Hill sent me a message afterward and said great job, and her and I started talking—in this day and time, with as tough as it is and how many good trainers there are, how many good horses there are, it is so hard to win first place. When you do, you relish in that, because it validates a lot of people. Not just you as a trainer, but it validates the owner, the breeders, it validates the stud owners. A lot of people depend on you showing what those horses are made of," she said. "So to me, it means a lot, because I work really hard to get where I am. It gives you a confidence boost in moments that you doubt yourself, so you can remember who you are."

Most importantly to Montgomery, the championship brings recognition to Cyrus for the athlete that he is.

"We as riders accentuate what horses are, but those great horses are just great. I don't like to take hardly any credit, because those horses are the great ones," Montgomery said. "He's one of those horses. He's one of the special ones."