

Dufferin teenager to compete in cattle, equestrian, poultry shows at Royal Winter Fair for first time in event's history



Written By SAM ODROWSKI

A 16-year-old Dufferin County resident will compete at an unprecedented level during the 102nd Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

While it takes a high level of talent and dedication to show livestock in just one competition at the Royal, Ava Campbell of Mono will be vying for ribbons in several.

She will be a contender in two horse shows, a cattle show, and a poultry show, with her chickens and ducks.

"We're very proud of this accomplishment, and in our recent memory of the fair, this is the first time that we have seen something like this," said the Royal Winter Fair's CEO Cyrus Cooper about the number of competitions Campbell's competing in. "It's quite a feat."

The Royal Winter Fair takes place from Nov. 1 to 10 at Exhibition Place, where the best competitors across Canada compete at a national level.

“Every year, the Royal is circled on various competitors' calendars, whether you're an Olympic rider or a young, aspiring rider,” Cooper noted.

Campbell's ability to train and present animals well is what's led her to qualify for so many different competitions at this year's Royal.

She is eager to show different kinds of livestock and is working hard to prepare in hopes of taking home some ribbons.

At past Royal Winter Fairs, she has done well in horse riding competitions, as this is her main focus.

“A couple of years ago I won a lot of classes in the smalls [horse category], and then I was overall grand champion in the ponies,” Campbell recalled. “Last year I was third overall in the Jump Canada Medal Finals Equitation Class.”

She has again qualified to compete in the Junior Hunters Division Horse Show as well as the Jump Canada Finals.

“She's been showing horses [at the Royal] for years and competing,” said Campbell's father Mark. “The Royal is like the playoffs, if you will, for horse riding.”

To qualify, Campbell regularly competed in horse shows at the Caledon Equestrian Park and Angelstone Tournaments in Rockwood.

“You show the horses all year and then you qualify through points. You have to be top eight in Ontario to go [to the Royal] for the horses,” Campbell explained.

Throughout the winter, she's in Florida training on horseback, and taking online school so she can remain committed to her passion for riding.

Campbell is hoping her dedication to horse riding throughout the year will yield positive results at the Royal.

“It's rewarding when you continue to get better throughout the year, and then seeing the hard work pay off?” going to these big venues and doing well,” she enthused.

Campbell's mother Elizabeth also has a love for horses and riding. She competed in the Royal Winter Fair when she was a teenager as well and is always excited to see her daughter do the same.

“Her mother plays a big role in the helping with the horse and the training as well,” Mark noted. “The horses have always been a big part of my wife's life.”

Campbell's been invited on a recruiting trip to the University of South Carolina and hopes to earn a scholarship to compete with the school's equestrian team.

For the Royal's cattle show, Campbell will be competing in it for her very first time.

She's competed in sanctioned cattle shows at fairs in the region through the summer to prepare.

Campbell will be showing a full-blood Simmental heifer, owned by cattle breeder Charles Burns of Kingsfield Farms.

Burns said Campbell first developed an interest in showing cattle about seven years ago when they met at the Royal and has been persistent in pursuing the opportunity ever since.

'She kept asking me until I said, 'sure,' and let her show at the Markham Fair for a couple years, and I told her she can show at the Royal this year,' Burns recalled.

He added that Campbell has the right temperament for showing animals.

'There's some people that animals just trust, they don't flinch, they're not scared of them. They seem to trust the person right away, and she has whatever that skill is,' Burns noted. 'The animals don't run away from her.'

For the competition, Campbell's focus will be on ensuring her heifer looks at its best at any given moment, standing tall and remaining calm.

When it comes to the ducks and chickens Campbell is entering in the Royal, she was recently named Junior Championship for her waterfowl at the Ontario Poultry Breeders Show.

She said she's eager to compete in this category as well.

The Royal Winter Fair features a variety of competitions that allow qualifying Canadians to demonstrate their skills and move on to international championships.

'We're very proud of the fact that the Royal offers the opportunity to compete at a high level for various individuals from all walks of life, age, and gender as well,' Cooper said. 'That's what's unique about the Royal every year, and that's what makes it special.'