

on their rodeo team. After obtaining her Bachelor's degree in Ag Business, she decided what she really wanted to do was train futurity horses for barrel racing.

"It was kind of always in the back of my mind. I always wanted to do it," she explained. She figured she had a degree to fall back on and while she had the chance to give this career a try, she was going to go for it.

"What exactly is futurity racing?" I asked her.

"Futurities are for four and five year old horses only. An owner can decide whether to run their horse as a four or five year old, but they can only compete as a futurity horse for one year. The new (fiscal) year begins December 1 and the horse may not compete in any barrel races until that day. Breeder's futurities are limited to horses by stallions that have been nominated to specific futurity programs. The futurity business is very big on the promotion of genetics and barrel racing bloodlines and breeder's futurities give the opportunity to showcase the progeny of nominated stallions," she explains.

Because Van Gerpen did so well barrel racing with her first futurity horse, it set her up to continue racing with more horses. "Thanks to that horse it made my life a lot easier to keep going," she said. She started raising her own horses and trained them for barrel racing. After racing well with a few, some people wanted her to ride horses for them and her vision evolved from there. She has been competitively training horses for the last four or five years.

Van Gerpen gives credit to her first horse and her 4-H director for her riding success. "Growing up we just had the one horse and we did everything with him. Into high school we still used him. He lived to be 28 years old, we finally had to put him down last spring. I'd have to put a lot of my credit just on riding him when I was young. We had an amazing 4-H director and she helped me a lot with my horse." Guidance from other experienced riders has also helped her in this process. She has previously worked with Jill Moody from Pierre, SD who is a four-time National Finals Rodeo (NFR) qualifier. Amy Schimke from Wessington Springs, SD has also been an influence, Van Gerpen now rides many horses by her stallions.

As you can imagine, the cold South Dakota winters won't allow her to train horses year-round. She has come up with a solution to continue year-round training that works rather well, heading south for the winter months to a home her family has in Wittman, Arizona, just northwest of Phoenix. The property, equipped with a horse arena and pens, is the ideal place for her to continue her horse training when the temperature drops in the Midwest. This year, she will be training and caring for twelve head of horses until she returns home for the fall futurities.

Van Gerpen puts in long days during her training season in Arizona, starting her days around six o'clock A.M. with an initial feeding and watering of the horses. Because there are no pastures in Arizona, the horses are kept in pens and must be fed and watered regularly. After they finish eating, she will saddle up as many as she has saddles for and tie them in the arena, spending some time with each horse individually. When some get done, she will unsaddle them and saddle some others for their turn, averaging about eight horses per day. Daily maintenance of cleaning of the pens, watering the arena and washing off the horses is also required.

How difficult is the riding portion of the training process? "It's a lot of hours," she states. For instance, with a young horse, she might ride it twenty minutes one day and two hours the next day.

A really great day could be followed with a really bad day. Every horse has a different style that they want to run so she has to adjust her training for every horse. "You have to figure out how they want to be trained and what works for them too. It keeps you on your toes," she states.

Though training is not an easy task, Van Gerpen's desire to continue comes from the progress she sees during the training process. She explains, "It is fun to see that colt go from not being started on the barrels to running the best that day. It's very fulfilling and rewarding to see that happen when you rode them every day and see the progress that they've made. That's what I like about training futurity horses is the process that you see and how much they change so fast."

She rides several horses for clients but also has many of her own to ride. Most of her clients that she rides for are from South Dakota, and she's worked the past few years with a repeat client from Nebraska. She becomes well-acquainted with her training horses as she usually has them for a full year to work with. As part of her training process, she trailers the horses to various barrel races around the area and pays a fee to run them on a mock barrel run to determine how well they are coming along in the process. This allows her to run them in an actual race setting but not actually race them. This year, she plans to head to races in Oklahoma City in December, Arizona in January, Texas in March and Washington in April before heading back home to South Dakota for the other part of the year to help her family on the farm.



❖ DREAM *continued on page 10*



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