

Mardi Gras memories, classic events highlight Amador County Fair

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

By Scott Thomas Anderson (sanderson@ledger-dispatch.com) - Raheem Hosseini

The smell of corn dogs, ruby snow cones and farm animals blew through the Plymouth air, sweeping over the dusty carnival rides, the blaring music, the crowded midway - and every other hometown nuance that makes the Amador County Fair the most anticipated local event of the year.

The fair kicked off Thursday with the Miss Amador Scholarship Competition. After five young women put their talents on display, 17-year-old Katie Hancock of Pine Grove was crowned Miss Amador. Hancock is a previous winner of the Hope of America Award and has held a grade point average in the top 10 in her class for seven semesters. She's published articles and plans to pursue a career in journalism. Hancock received a \$2,000 scholarship and will represent Amador County throughout the year. Other winners included Tessa Myers, first runner-up; Courtney Anderson, second runner-up and Miss Congeniality; Arieal Konze, third runner-up; and Hailey Harvey, fourth runner-up.

That same night, a grinding roar ripped through the stands of Benny Brown arena as dozens of riders on dirt bikes, quads and pit bikes peeled around the track, spewing clods of wet dirt into the first few rows, much to the delight of an enthusiastic audience watching. The rambunctious melee represented a historic night for the fair, being the very first time it hosted a flat track motorcycle race.

"Fire in the hole!" called the emcee, moments before the gates opened to let loose a horde of colorful riders on dirt bikes spinning around the track for some "hot laps," or practice runs. No. 20, clad in bright orange, raced out ahead and stayed there for the remainder of the practice laps. Next came the pit bikes, which look like smaller quads running at 50 CCs on 14-inch tires. The emcee referred to them as "big kids on little-boy bikes." Van Halen's "I Can't Drive '55" would have proven a thematic fit if only anyone could hear it over the ear-splitting motors of two racers. But soon, the rear gate released three more riders and even the cheers were drowned out.

On Saturday the arena was host to a different kind of chaos, with barrel racers and team ropers putting their skills to the test. There was a brief later afternoon pause in the action as the fair's Mardi Gras Parade got underway, led by Miss Amador and the St. Gabriel's Celestial Brass Band.

The Saturday night sundown saw the California Cowboy's Professional Rodeo Association come to town, with bronc busting, bull riding and steer wrestling on full display. "The excitement of competing in these events is like therapy," said Alicia Sterling, a third-year barrel racer. "It's a major adrenaline rush."

"The crowds are really great this year too," added Mindy Whitney, another barrel racer. "You can see there's a lot of people here tonight having fun - a lot of kids excited to be here. Being part of the rodeo, like the fair itself, is being part of an American tradition."



A cowboy competes in the cattle roping competition Saturday afternoon at the Amador County Fair.

Photo by: [Scott Thomas Anderson](#)



Justin Woods holds his 2-week-old lamb, Buddy.

Photo by: [Jerry Budrick](#)

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Left, Amy White and her son, Blake, 14 months old, were among the several parents and toddlers participating in the Diaper Derby contest Thursday at the Amador County Fair. Twenty-one babies, up to 18 months old, participated in the race.

Photo by: [Bethany A. Monk](#)



Katie Hancock, right, is crowned Miss Amador. Other winners included, from left, fourth runner-up Hailey Harvey, third runner-up Arieal Konze, second runner-up and Miss Congeniality Courtney Anderson, and first runner-up Tessa Myers.

Photo by: [Mayra Jimenez](#)



An X-tremely Amped motorcyclist performs a high jump off a ramp during the exhibition in Plymouth.

Photo by: [Kelly Scott](#)



Kit Carson Mountain Men member "Al" dances with an audience member during a set by the Dave Sousa Band.

Photo by: [Kelly Scott](#)



A grinding roar ripped through the stands of Benny Brown arena Thursday, as dozens of riders on dirt bikes, quads and pit bikes peeled around the track, much to the delight of an enthusiastic audience watching the historic fair's first time hosting a flat track motorcycle race.

Photo by: [Raheem Hosseini](#)



Amador resident Amy Hohn sings the Etta James classic "At Last," during the Amador Idol competition Saturday. Hohn went on to win first place in the competition after the audience voted for their favorite out of the five contestants. Hohn took home a \$100 prize.

Photo by: [Bethany A. Monk](#)



Spike McGuire juggles three fire batons Sunday.

Photo by: [Mayra Jimenez](#)



Two cars collide at the Destruction Derby Sunday.

Photo by: [Mayra Jimenez](#)



Amador resident and young cowboy Jeremiah Hunt, 6, visits the truck show and stands in front of one of his

favorite entries.

Photo by: [Bethany A. Monk](#)



Driving car No. XXX (The Little Mermaid), Bryan Belmares of Amador City drives in the second heat of the Destruction Derby Sunday. Belmares went on to take the championship, his second in a row at the Amador County Fair.

Photo by: [Jim Reece](#)