

# Kassi Pinion

by Tafra Donberger

Tracking down the 2008 Todd Drummond Award winner isn't too difficult: On Friday evenings, Kassi Pinion is often on the road traveling to a horse show with her family. The 16-year-old is frequently horseback, spending a minimum of three hours each day riding.

How is that possible for a teenager? Kassi is home-schooled by her mother, Julie, which gives her extra time for equine activities, as long as her schoolwork is finished. Her dad, Billy, trains horses, another advantage. In fact, the Pinion family lives very close to the 4RK Ranch in Stanfield, North Carolina, where Billy works for Dr. Thomas Armstrong.

Kassi has seven siblings: Kristi, 25, Kerri, 23, Kelli, 18, Kaydi, 13, Kortni, 11, Clay, 8, and Cole, 3. Horses entered the family after the first three children were born, so Kassi was raised with horses. They participated in various avenues, including open shows and team penning.

When Billy began training cutting horses, Kassi naturally picked it up. She began cutting in earnest in 2006. Her first cutting mount was Smart And Freckled.

In 2007, the Pinions purchased Sheeza Peppish Maxi from Dr. Armstrong, and Kassi and "Sheeza" won five trophies from local cutting associations and qualified for the Eastern National Championships and the NCHA World Finals in the \$2,000 Limit Rider and Senior Youth. At the 2007 Quarter Horse Congress, Kassi finished in the Top 10 in Senior Youth Cutting.

In her short time in the cutting pen, Kassi's most memorable moment has been earning her first 75 score, which came at a show held at the North Augusta Hippodrome



in South Carolina. "I stayed up really late to ride in the Novice Non-Pro," Kassi recalled. "We didn't win, but I did get the 75."

For Kassi, the cut itself is most challenging. "Making your cut pretty is probably the hardest part," she said.

Out of the cutting pen, Kassi is actively involved at West Stanly Baptist Church. She participates in the AWANA program, which stands for "Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed." Having been involved since she was 3, Kassi now helps out in the kindergarten to second grade group.

She's a "leader in training" at the church, which involves working with children who are bussed in from underprivileged neighborhoods. In 2007, Kassi went to Jacksonville, Florida, to compete in the Summit National Varsity Games with her team, which finished second in the nation out of 64 teams.

In addition to her 10th grade curriculum, Kassi is planning to take college courses at Stanly Community College. Everyone who knows Kassi knows her to be hardworking, friendly and supportive. She's worked for Dr. Armstrong at the ranch since she was 10, riding horses, cleaning stalls, and doing anything asked of her.

At cutting events, Kassi always cheers on her fellow competitors, regardless of her own performance.

"She's a fun loving person," said Julie. "She's always been outgoing. She'll talk to anybody, anywhere. It's hard to find her down. She wants to improve, and is never out and upset."

When she's not helping her family prepare for competition, Kassi will often help others lope or care for their horses, and is often specifically sought out for help.

Former NYCHA President and Hall of Famer Matthew Blewitt was one of several who recommended Kassi for the award. "I served as an Area 18 NYCHA director, and she was one of the few that showed up to help with fundraising activities and community service," Blewitt wrote.

Area 18 Cutting Horse Association members are proud to have Kassi in their region, and were part of the effort to nominate her.

"They say character is what you do while no one is watching," wrote Judy Boozer, Area 18 secretary. "Kassi, like most young people, was probably unaware that people were watching the way she conducted herself, the things she did and things she said. But we were watching, and what we saw makes us proud to have her on the East Coast."

Overall, it's her character that makes Kassi's family, both through blood and through cutting, love her. Cutting has had a tremendous effect on her life, teaching her dedication, discipline and responsibility; in that same way, Kassi will continue to impact her cutting community with her hard work and sportsmanship. ★