

A Winner

By Suzy Hopkins

As horse show photographer I had been hired to take pictures of a girl named Mercedes who was to be riding her trainer's saddle bred horse, a breed known for its skittishness. I looked for an older teenager. The first thing I saw was this beautiful white, brown and black mountain of a horse being directed by a little girl dressed in a gray-blue formal riding outfit with a pale gray bowler hat. Her legs were so short her feet didn't go past the flap of the saddle where you need to give the horse commands with your feet.

Mercedes did everything the judge requested, immediately and gracefully. Most of the others competing in this class were older kids and adults. While waiting for the judges' decision Mercedes' mother told me this was the first competition her five-year-old daughter had been in since 'the accident.' A pony she had been riding smashed her into a fence covered with barbed wire. Her face had required many stitches. Her parents figured she would never ride again. Not so. The first thing she did after getting home from the hospital was ride that pony.

She won the blue ribbon in her class and all the other classes this brave five-year-old entered that day. Some people are born to ride horses.