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NEWS RELEASE

Shanks' sublime score highlights final day of Cutting Horse Futurity

CALGARY – The horse is named Call Me Smurf. The rider? Let's call him astonished.

Neil Shanks of Priddis, Alta., would have been over the moon just to win a major Futurity event, since he's only in his second season of showing cutting horses. But the 220 mark he scored aboard Call Me Smurf on Sunday at the Stampede Corral – the highest mark awarded during the five-day Calgary Stampede Cutting Horse Futurity presented by Wrangler – now, that calls for a celebration.

"The ride was phenomenal. Pretty amazing," said Shanks of his victory in the Non-Pro Classic Challenge category. "Especially when it's done with a score like that. The judges here are (National Cutting Horse Association)-sanctioned judges; they see a lot of really great cutting horses, I'm sure, in their travels across North America. They're not giving a lot of points away . . . so when those guys give you two 73s and a 74, that's a pretty good run.

"It was unbelievably emotional," added Shanks. "You're supposed to try and be the tough guy, but I tell you what – it's pretty hard not to let a tear or two go."

The Stampede's 29th annual Cutting Horse Futurity, which wrapped up with weekend category finals at the Corral, is the premier cutting event in Canada. This year's edition boasted a total prize purse of more than \$300,000, and attracted 108 riders and 217 horses from as far away as Perth, Ont., and Weatherford, Texas.

While Saturday night saw the trainers and professional riders of the Open classes strut their stuff, Sunday afternoon featured the Non-Pro categories for riders who make no part of their income training cutting horses, and can only compete on horses owned by themselves or immediate family members.

Call Me Smurf, a five-year-old quarterhorse gelding, was locally raised and trained by Guy Heintz of Rafter H Ranche in High River. Shanks only rediscovered his love of horses about a half-dozen years ago, taking up team penning and then drifting into cutting, and was quick to deflect credit for Sunday's extraordinary ride.

"I'm very new at the sport, so to be able to win an event like this, with a score like that, wouldn't happen without an amazing, well-trained horse, and the four guys (turnback riders and herd holders) out there who are professionals, and coach you through the whole thing," said Shanks. "They make it possible for someone like myself, who's an amateur, to be able to achieve something like that.

"Call Me Smurf is an amazing athlete. He's very strong, and has great cow sense and cow smarts," added Shanks, who also owns Miss Docaboon, a half-sister to Call Me Smurf, which Heintz rode to victory at the 2007 Calgary Stampede cutting horse competition.

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Besides his victory in the Non-Pro Classic Challenge category for five- and six-year-old steeds, Shanks also won the \$50,000 Limit Amateur Class within Non-Pro Classic Challenge, for those with NCHA earnings of less than \$50,000 as of Jan. 1, 2009. With respective first-place cheques of \$8,748.66 and \$5,640, that meant a very tidy pay day of more than \$14,000.

Darcy Geherman of Wembley, Alta., finished second in Non-Pro Classic Challenge, laying down a 216 on EBR Eye Candy and earning \$6,906.84.

The Stampede's annual Futurity event showcases the pure athleticism, instinct, agility and intelligence of the cutting horse. With horse-and-rider teams attempting to cut at least two, and most often three, individual cows out of a herd within 150 seconds, cutting has evolved into one of the most exciting equine events in North America. Contestants are evaluated by a panel of three judges and assessed a score based on the horse's instinctive reactions, the challenges made by the cows cut, and any errors in judgment made by the horse or rider.

Les Jack of Rocanville, Sask., took home two red ribbons Sunday. He won the Non-Pro Futurity final, for three-year-old horses, on SDP Miss Me Sue, their 218-point ride earning him \$7,934.32, and also rode SmartyscowgirlDiablo to victory in the Non-Pro Derby final, for four-year-old horses, scoring 219 and taking home \$6,199.38.

Heintz's wife Moneca was second in Non-Pro Derby aboard Miss Kitari with a 212, worth \$4,339.57. Danny Jones of Ponoka, Alta., was runner-up in Non-Pro Futurity, scoring 211 on Feline Smooth and tucking \$5,667.37 into his Wranglers.

Blaine Pickard of Pincher Creek, Alta., was crowned champ in Non-Pro 7 Up, for horses aged seven and older, with an aggregate two-round score of 426 that earned him \$2,880.00.

Greg Gartner of Sherwood Park, Alta., won the \$50,000 Limit Amateur Class within Non-Pro Derby, winning \$2,220.00 on Pistols Della Ray. There were no amateurs entered in Non-Pro Futurity or Non-Pro 7 Up.

For full results, please visit www.stampedeagriculture.com

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.