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Riding High in Pendleton

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Riding high in Pendleton

With an effervescent smile, the graceful wave of a hand and lots of hooting and hollering, Darlene Thompson '07 fulfilled a lifelong dream this summer.

Thompson, an accounting and math double major from Weston, served as a princess for the Pendleton Roundup, one of Oregon's largest and most renowned rodeos.

"Ever since I was a little girl I've been going to the rodeo, sitting in the stands and waiting for my turn to be out there riding," said Thompson.

Her turn came in September when she successfully maneuvered the Pendleton grand entry, one of the most difficult entries in the Pacific Northwest. Riding Red, a 16-year-old sorrel gelding, Thompson entered the arena at a full gallop, jumped two fences, came to an abrupt halt in front of 20,000 spectators, then raced around the quarter-mile track twice – all one-handed while waving to the crowd.

"It's dangerous," Thompson admits. "It's a pressure cooker for horses, too. A horse has a mind of its own so anything can happen."

The Pendleton Roundup, which began in 1910, is practically a family affair for Thompson, who has attended the rodeo every year since age 5. Her grandfather has led the dress up parade for 42 years and family members are devoted volunteers. So it was only natural that Thompson, a skilled horsewoman, would take her turn in the spotlight.

The five-member court spent the spring and summer appearing at elementary schools, nursing homes, luncheons, banquets, rodeos and parades, leading up to the roundup. But Thompson was unfazed by the hectic schedule.

"It was lots of work, but the roundup organizers want to have girls representing them who are involved in their communities and



Darlene Thompson '07 completes a grand entry jump atop Red, one of three horses she rode as a princess for the Pendleton Roundup in September.

doing something with their lives," she said. "Those are the kinds of things Linfield looks for, too."

As if the responsibilities of the rodeo weren't enough, Thompson interned with Chris Cockburn '91 of Fife, Cockburn and Co., LLP, an accounting firm in Pendleton. Cockburn is a director for Happy Canyon, affiliated with the roundup, and understood the demands placed on Thompson.

"The experience introduced me to a different side of accounting," said Thompson, who audited school districts along with Ronna (Ayers) Lindstrom '98. "I'm thinking about coming back to the area and this will help me decide."

Now back on campus for her senior year, Thompson's pace has not slowed. She sings in the choir and took part in the Opera Workshop performance last year. She played volleyball, served as a peer advisor and is a member of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Phi Sigma Sigma sorority and three

national honor societies for business, service and academics.

This is a typical Thompson achievement, according to Mike Jones, professor of accounting and Thompson's advisor.

"She's probably accomplished more in 21 years than many people do in a lifetime," Jones said. "She's involved in so many different things and she's usually at the top of the heap. I'm proud to know her."

Jones traveled to Pendleton to watch Thompson "spin around the track on her horse at what seemed like 90 mph." And he wasn't the only Thompson fan there. Other Linfield community members also made the trip.

"Faculty and staff cheer you on," said Thompson. "So many of them were excited for me when they found out I made court. A school like Linfield is interested in their students and wants to celebrate with them."

— Laura Davis