



By Dan DeWeese, Editor at Large

Congress Rules

Anybody who entertains doubts about the financial clout of the horse industry should spend some time at The All American Quarter Horse Congress in Columbus, Ohio. This annual three-week love fest of all things Quarter Horse concluded its 41st event at the end of October. Sponsored by the Ohio Quarter Horse Association (OQHA), it is touted as the largest single-breed horse show in the world.

The OQHA backs up that claim with some impressive and even astounding numbers. For example, the Congress attracts more than 600,000 people and pumps an estimated \$110 million into the Columbus area economy. That's a horse with some wind.

This year's event was a record breaker on several fronts, according to

Connie Lechleitner, OQHA editor of publications. The number of entries in the classes and competitions jumped from around 16,000 in 2006 to more than 20,000 this year and involved 9,000 registered Quarter Horses. A record-smashing first weekend attendance found 33,000 vehicles pouring onto the Ohio state fairgrounds, where the event is held.

The chief draw, of course, is the horse. Classes, competitions and demonstrations cover the gamut of Western and English riding disciplines and attract the cream of the American Quarter Horse Association's (AQHA) human and equine membership. If the demographic mix for the AQHA membership holds for Congress entrants, 68 percent ride Western and 36 percent ride English. If you're


doing the math, those figures indicate that at least four percent ride both, and by all accounts, that number is probably considerably higher. The AQHA has been proclaiming the versatility of the breed and promoting all riding styles among Quarter Horse devotees for decades.

The mix of horse owners, trainers, groomers and riders, plus relatives, friends and hundreds of thousands of horse enthusiasts who flock to the Congress, are a natural attraction for equine exhibitors. Some 200 commercial exhibitors took up seven acres of space this year in two cavernous exhibit halls and adjacent grounds.

The exhibitors included retailers, custom and off-the-rack show apparel makers, tack and saddle makers, jewelers, horse health and nutrition vendors, home furnishing companies, barn and stable builders, corral and fencing suppliers, equine insurance representatives, horse transportation retailers and manufacturers of nearly every geegaw, ointment or service a horse and his handlers might need or want.

Exhibitors seemed generally quite happy with sales and interest drummed up during this marathon horse show. According to Lisa Martin, who is responsible for commercial exhibits at Congress, "the majority had smiles on their faces" at the close of the event. She said that people who come to Congress to compete or just to attend save up all year to buy riding goods there.

"People like to buy things they can take home to family members," she explained. "If you're looking for something for the horse or rider, come to Congress—it'll be there."

For more information about the All-American Quarter Horse Congress, contact the Ohio Quarter Horse Association at www.oqha.com. 

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