

# Living the Dream

Copenhagen Cat earned more Amateur money than any other cutting horse last year, and in the process, he made his owner's dreams come true.

By Katie Navarra

## Speechless. Karen Boughnou

was at a loss for words when she learned her horse, Copenhagen Cat, was No. 1 on the **Equi-Stat** Annual Cutting Statistics Amateur Horses chart. He accumulated more Amateur earnings than any other horse in 2016, banking \$40,202 to finish a mere \$111 ahead of the second-highest-earning horse of the year, Let Georgie Do It. In total, Copenhagen Cat's lifetime earnings tally \$84,255.

When she finally spoke, Boughnou, of Weatherford, Texas, described "Copenhagen" as a godsend and a blessing.

"There are not words to express how much joy he's given me over the years," she said of the 11-year-old homebred gelding (Cats Merada x Playing Lynx x Lectric Playboy). "He takes his job seriously. He is extremely consistent and works hard to please."

In addition to accumulating the highest amateur earnings for the year, the pair earned the 2016 National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) \$50,000 Amateur Reserve World Championship. They were also the year-end \$50,000 Amateur Champions for Area 9, and altogether, collected two trophy saddles and three buckles.

"Last year was the best year of my life. I am grateful I got to spend it living my dream."

## Dreaming of horses

As a child, Boughnou loved horses, but no one else in the family shared her passion. Consequently, she didn't learn to ride as a youth. She promised herself that one day she would own a place in the country with a few horses and dogs, and eventually learn to ride.

She attended Texas A&M University, where she earned a degree in engineering and immersed herself in her career while quietly working toward her dream. Eager to own that first horse, she bought an untrained 2-year-old and quickly learned a green horse and a green rider aren't a good combination. Her second purchase was much better, yet still, something was lacking.

In 1992, she attended the NCHA Futurity to visit an Australian friend who happened to be working with cutters in America. Little did she know it would change her life. There, she met Ronnie and Theresa Rice, and she and Theresa became fast friends.

"I visited them whenever I could. Most often it was at shows. I helped clean stalls and feed. They even let me exercise a horse now and then," she said.

The Rices took Boughnou under their wings and taught her the ins-and-outs of the industry, helping her overcome her fears. She seized every opportunity to ride and hone her horsemanship skills. In 1997, the Rices convinced her to buy Shesawheel Aledo Gay. Boughnou began competing a few weekends a month, casually showing in the \$2,000 Limit Rider and \$10,000 Amateur classes.

A few years later, she was ready to advance and, with the Rices' help, bought Playing Lynx. The timing turned out to be inconvenient. Her career demanded more travel, leaving little time to ride and show. Rather than let Playing Lynx sit idle, she bred the mare.

"Ronnie recommended Cats Merada as the stallion and that was the beginning of Copenhagen Cat," she said.

## The making of a champion

In 2009, Boughnou sent then 3-year-old Copenhagen to Ronnie for training. Watching him progress was her outlet in a dark time.

"My father was fighting cancer and my job was demanding. Copenhagen was my hope for a brighter future," she said.

Knowing her limitations and sensing Copenhagen was something special, she asked Ronnie to show the horse through his aged event career. She continued to ride every horse Ronnie let her, and she spent hours in the round pen soaking up each tip he threw her way. Every now and then she competed on Copenhagen, but nerves and inexperience inhibited her success.

All that changed in June 2014, when



Hart Photos

Copenhagen Cat carried Karen Boughnou to the \$50,000 Amateur Reserve World Championship while banking more Amateur money than any other horse in 2016.

Boughnou retired. With time on her hands and a recommendation from the Rices that the only way to get over the nerves was to put that trained horse in the trailer and go, she and Copenhagen hit the road, showing nearly every weekend. Within a half-year, they earned \$22,876 and finished the season at the NCHA World Finals. Boughnou placed second at the World Finals and finished the year in fourth place in the standings.

"I learned so much that year about how much it really takes to put together a winning run, while keeping your partner sound and happy to compete," she said.

## Making it count

Boughnou knew 2016 was her last opportunity to compete in the \$50,000 Amateur.

"I knew I would never have a horse like Copenhagen Cat again, so we hit the trail."

She hauled more than 25,000 miles with "Stetson," her Australian Shepherd sidekick, and Copenhagen to compete in six different states. In total, the pair went to the herd more than 120 times with the majority of those runs in the \$50,000 Amateur class. She acknowledged it takes a team to go to the herd, and was grateful for the help she received over the last few years.

"There are too many names to mention, but you know who you are and I send out a big 'thank you' to each of you," she said.

Copenhagen is currently enjoying a well-deserved three months of rest. In the spring, he will resume light exercise and Boughnou plans to show him lightly through the summer to keep her skills up in anticipation of the NCHA Futurity in the fall. There she plans to show another homebred gelding, Simply Metallic, Copenhagen's half-brother.

"Copenhagen was the first horse I raised and he was a gift from God. He will always have a home with me," she said. ★