## Reserve Grand Champions

## MSU's horse judging team off to a winning start

**By Sarah Buckleitner** 

Horse judging team broke out of the starting gate at a gallop. Formed and coached by Dr. Clay Cavinder, associate professor in Animal and Dairy Sciences, the team was named Reserve Grand Champion at the All American Quarter Horse Congress in Columbus, Ohio, the largest horse show in the world.

Horse judging is the process of assessing the appearance and performance of a horse in comparison to the breed standard. The ability to judge an animal's conformation and movement is an important skill to have in the horse world.

"How an animal is built dictates its performance. We call it form to function. Being able to look at a horse and logically analyze how it is put together helps you know what discipline the animal is suited for. The ideal cutting horse is built very differently than the ideal show jumping horse," Cavinder explained.

ISSISSIPPI STATE'S NEW : individually recognized sport—apart from livestock judging in general—since the 1960s. However, MSU's horse judging team has been dormant for many years. While the team might be new to the

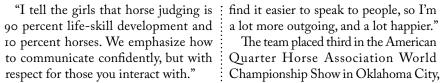
arena, they take competition seriously. "I have a motto I live by," Cavinder said. "It is not important that we win. It is imperative that we prepare to win." Perhaps because of this motto, Cavinder wasn't surprised by their ear-

ly success. "The students took that to heart; they took initiative and practiced. Leading up to Congress, people would ask how I thought the team was going to do and I told them—we're good. The students 🗄 made the decision to know their stuff and that paid off," Cavinder said.

Determination and drive are what has defined this team from the very beginning. "Our department needed something is teaches them to justify their decisions competitive to get involved with, and so <sup>‡</sup> through effective communication—a this team attracted the best of the best. skill that many of the team members Horse judging has existed as an : Their intelligence combined with their : feel has impacted every facet of their life.

desire to be involved led to success. Now we just have to keep it up," Cavinder said.

The typical horse judging competition consists of students ranking four horses, and then orally defending their decisions to an expert in a session called Reason. This practice not only teaches students how to assess horses for physical and performance faults, but it



In an interview posted on their Facebook page, junior Animal and Dairy Science major, Samantha Miller stated, E "Being a member of the team has impacted me as a person. I've gained exponential amounts of confidence. And I've learned to bridge the gap between mind *http://cals.msstate.edu/students/team.asp.* and mouth, as Dr. Cavinder would say. I

The team placed third in the American

a lot more outgoing, and a lot happier." Quarter Horse Association World Championship Show in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in the Merial AQHA World Championship Collegiate Horse Judging Contest on November 18th.

To meet the team and learn more about horse judging, visit



ABOVE: Horse judging team enjoys downtime with Dr. Cavinder's horse at the Equine Unit on the H.H. Levick Animal Research Center (South Farm).