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# Reidsville girl a World Champion in keyhole and flag horse racing

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By MARY DOLAN Staff writer

Girls of 15 all have favorite accessories: purses or earrings or shoes. But one girl in Reidsville has a few shiny belt buckles that prove she's a little different than most girls her age.

Lauren Mahaffey rides horses, and the girl with the braces and the long brown hair won first place in three events at the Pinto World Championship Horse Show in Oklahoma last month.

Mahaffey, 15, will be a sophomore at Reidsville High School next year. But in her down time, she isn't obsessing over her next trip to the mall; she's outside riding one of her family's seven horses.

## Reidsville girl a World Champion in keyhole and flag horse racing

Lauren Mahaffey won three world championship titles, with the help of her horse Major, at the Pinto World Champion Horse Show in Tulsa, Okla., in June. Mahaffey has won a total of four world championships.

Mahaffey will tell you she's been riding horses longer than she's been walking. She's broken several bones along the way and knows what it's like to look at the belly of a horse and see a flurry of hooves. But she loves horses more than anything.

"I can't say I've never been scared," she admits. "But it's just the love of horses that gets you to get back on."

She experienced one of those scares the night before she was to ride her horse Pepper in Tulsa at the Pinto World Championship Horse Show. She was taking him around a series of barrels when suddenly he reared.

"On that third barrel, he just shot up," she said. She feared the worst.

"I thought (he'd trampled me) ... because all I saw was his back feet running over my face." Somehow she escaped uninjured. And, as luck would have it, she went on to win three World Champion belt buckles.

Mahaffey's been competing for most of her life, hardly recalling those first competitions as a

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tiny tot. She guesses she's participated in a couple hundred competitions in all – no small feat for someone her age.

With the help of blond-colored Major and brown and white Pepper, Mahaffey took home the designation of world champion in youth keyhole racing with a horse, youth flag racing with a pony and youth flag racing with a horse.

Her first world championship, completing the set of four she's earned altogether, came in 2007. Mahaffey lives for the adrenaline of the speed events like barrel racing and flag racing.

"My mom calls me the flag racing queen," Mahaffey said. Or, she adds, the FRQ for short.

It's that love of wind whipping and hair flying that's enticed her to competitions in Tulsa, Okla.; Fort Worth, Texas, and throughout the Southeast. It's an addiction she keeps feeding year after year.

Mahaffey, who's also in JROTC at her high school, isn't entirely sure what she'd like to do after she graduates, but she has considered joining the Marines. Still, she admits, it would be tough for her to give up on her dream of continuing to work with horses. She said she'd love to become a full-time trainer one day.

But Mahaffey has plenty of time to figure that out. For now, from her family's farm on Frank Road in the rural outer reaches of Reidsville, Mahaffey will continue saddling up her horses and riding.

And, of course, she'll have those shiny belt buckles to remind her of all that she's already accomplished, though she's modest and says she didn't think she'd come away with top honors in this year's competitions.

"I was actually very shocked, because I thought I had a bad run," she said.

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