

# Diary of a rodeo cowboy

At the Emerald Empire Roundup over the weekend, the Emerald kept a diary on rodeo cowboy Jim Kittleson. **6:35 p.m.** — Jim Kittleson, 38, saddles his horse, a 5-year-old named Homer. Homer's saddle is embossed with the title of Northwest Rodeo Association Best Bulldogger 1972. Kittleson rides across the Fairgrounds field to the arena.

Involved with rodeo since his sophomore year in high school in Eastern Montana, Kittleson moved to Oregon when he was 18 to shear sheep. He gave up bronc riding after his first marriage 18 years ago. "I couldn't afford to get crippled," he jokes. He's been bulldogging — wres-

"The big thing to worry about is your horse ducking out from the steer," Kittleson says. On the other side of the steer you need a good rider — called a hazer — to keep the steer in line.

Kittleson and his partner, Tom Findley, also competed in the first round of team roping on Thursday. Tonight they are in the second round. Kittleson is the team's header — it's his job to rope the steer around the neck. Findley is the healer — he's supposed to lasso the steer's hind legs. Take only one leg, and you're penalized five seconds.

Although Kittleson and Findley roped cleanly on Thursday, their time

drawn steer number 98, which in a previous round was taken in 7.8 seconds.

Before leaving the arena, Kittleson tells a buddy that he's now ranked fifth in bulldogging. "Sitting pretty, but won't win a dime," he says with a grin.

Outside, Kittleson says his bulldogging days are far from over — bulldoggers can get as old as 45. And, as a roper, he can always move on to senior events.

**7:45 p.m.** — The roping steers huddle in a corral beside the arena entrance. They are fitted with leather straps behind their horns for protection against rope burns. Kittleson, spotting number 98 in a tag on the ear of a



sandy-colored steer, jumps down into the corral to check the width of its horns. They're average-sized, and should present no special problem.

**7:50 p.m.** — Hat clasped over his heart, Kittleson stands for the national anthem.

**9:20 p.m.** — With a rodeo glove — like a batting glove — on his right hand, Kittleson backs Oakie against a foam-padded wall. He smiles at Tom on the other side of the steer's chute. A cowboy stands behind the steer, twisting the steer's tail, getting him in the mood to go. At the head of the chute, another cowboy looks to Kittleson.

Oakie settles in, his hindquarters braced against the padding. Kittleson throws his chin up. The chute man releases the gate.

Oakie springs forward. Homer comes out the other side. Kittleson's throw is wide. He takes the steer around the belly. The team records "No Time."

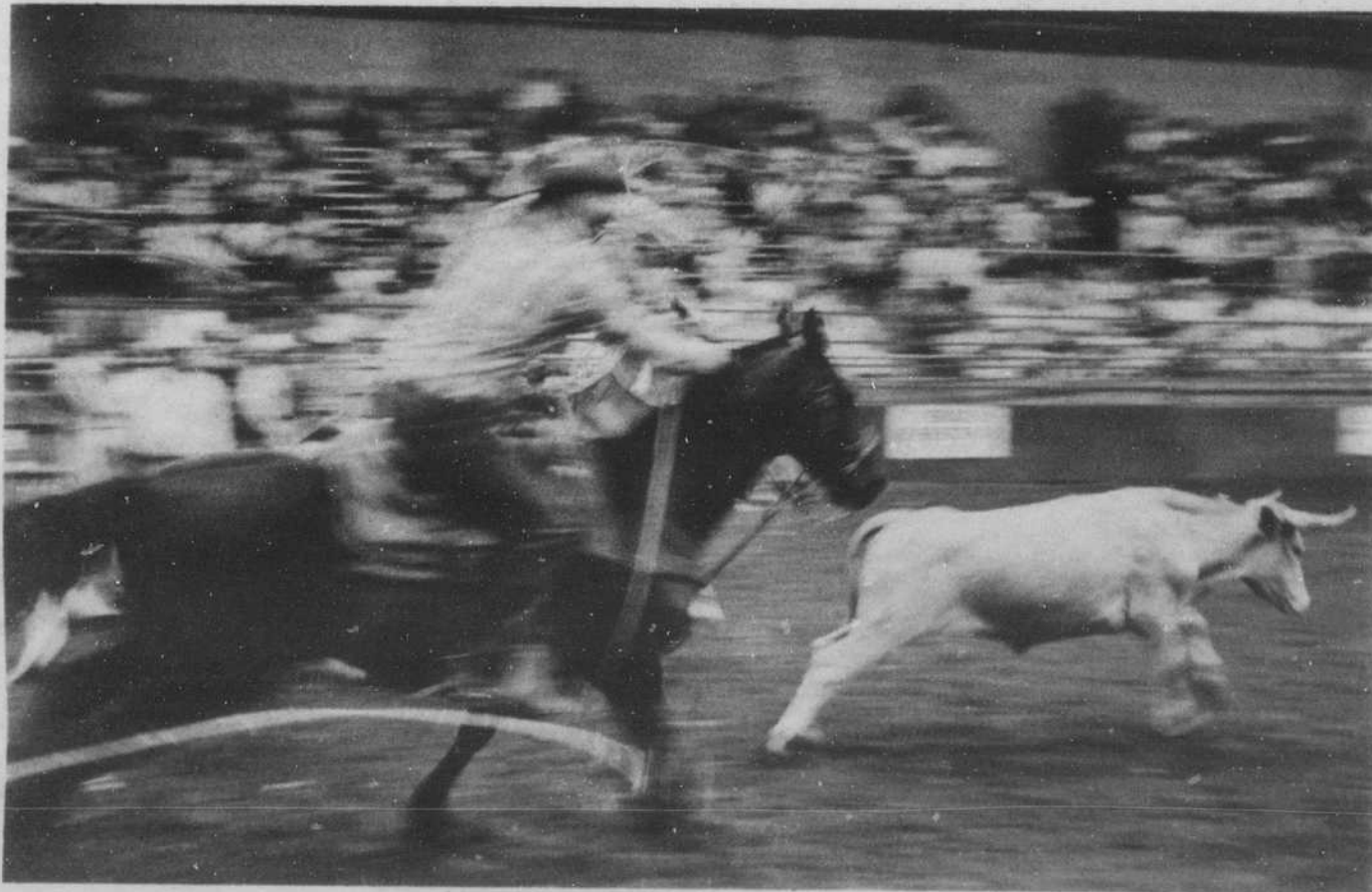
**9:38 p.m.** — Sitting back on the fence rail near the corrals, Kittleson chuckles as he takes a ribbing about being a belly-roper. His wife comes up to him and jokes, "Boy, you got him."

**10:10 p.m.** — In the parking lot, Homer backs off as he's loaded into his trailer. Kittleson carries some gear to a friend's rig in preparation for the long drive to Prineville for another rodeo. Someone wishes him "Good luck in Prineville."

"Better be better there than here," Kittleson says. "Here it weren't nothing."

Story by William Kogut

Photos by Mark Pynes



ting down steers — and team roping for the last 15 years, he says.

Kittleson builds horse trailers and shoes horses in Coburg. Rodeo is only a hobby for him, but during the summer rodeo season he practices his events five nights a week. This year he has made \$1,200 in five rodeos. He'll go to 12 or 15 rodeos by the end of the year, he figures, mostly in the Northwest.

Because of an injury he suffered a few years ago, Kittleson wears a motorcycle helmet when he bulldogs. He gets a lot of kidding from the other cowboys about the helmet, but he still wears it.

Kittleson took his steer down in 5.3 seconds — a time good enough for third place at that point in the competition. Only the top four finishers take home prize money.

was a high 13.9 seconds.

**6:55 p.m.** — Kittleson talks with friends while Jackie, his wife, hands him the canvas bag with his lariat. The lariat is a special grade of unusually stiff nylon rope.

**7:00 p.m.** — Outside the building the cowboys pay their fees for team roping — \$100 per man.

Kittleson then checks the times. The best single time in the team roping is 6.3 seconds. The best average between two rides is about 14 seconds. He figures the payoff at about \$520 per man for the winning team.

**7:17 p.m.** — In the arena, Kittleson works out Homer. Jackie rides with him on the team's other horse, Oakie. At 7:30, one of his three daughters takes over for his wife. Talking with a friend, Kittleson says his team has



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