

John Harrison returns to entertain at Farm-City

It might seem like he's clowning around, but John Harrison is a distinguished performer in the art of rodeo entertainment.

He's a three-time recipient of the Comedy Act of the Year award by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, and has also been selected by his peers three times to be the barrelman at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo. He's booked year-round at rodeos all across the country, and will find himself performing at the Farm-City Pro Rodeo this year.

But even as venues, audiences and comedy routines change through the years, family roots continue to fuel Harrison's passion for rodeo.

His grandfather was the late Freckles Brown, the 1962 world champion bull rider who managed to ride the "unrideable" bull Tornado. It was because of him that Har-

risson had his early exposure to the rodeo lifestyle.

"It was such an exciting way of living," Harrison said. "Everything is fast-paced and constantly moving. It immediately drew me in."

Harrison started out as a trick rider when he was just 6 years old. He became a certified member of the PRCA in 1999. Now 39 years old, Harrison has been working consistently as a rodeo clown.

His father, a loan officer, was skeptical at the prospect of his son's career path at first, and pushed him to pursue college, wanting Harrison to find a career path that would be financially stable. But after seeing him perform and the reactions that he draws from audiences, he was proud soon enough.

"He's as proud as a father can be when seeing his son performing in drag in front of a crowd," Harrison said.

Keeping the rodeo tradition in his family alive, he takes his family, including his wife Carla, daughters Addison, 10, Charlee, 2, and son Cazwell, 8, on the road with him.

It's a busy way of life, with Harrison booked for several performances a month, every month, all across the country. But they all love it.

"I could see my son becoming a rodeo clown himself," he said. "But I wouldn't be surprised if the rest of them wanted to stay put once they eventually pursue their own careers."

Harrison says that for his kids, traveling the country with their dad is like a bonus summer vacation. For Harrison, however, it's anything but. His job is extremely physical, demanding that he stays in peak physical condition. He wakes up early every morning and exercises, churning out at least 2.5 hours of cardio daily.

It's a career that's constantly physically demanding, and injuries are common.

"It comes with the job," he said. "If you're a football player and you get injured, you get to sit on the sidelines and still get a paycheck. When a rodeo clown gets sidelined, you have to keep going or else you go home. I have to keep

picking myself back up again and again. I'm always on the move."

And despite having been in the profession for so many years, Harrison says performing in front of an audience never gets old. The adrenaline rush he gets from every city and every crowd keeps things fresh and alive every night.

"You have to be able to improvise and work off-the-cuff; you never know what the crowd is going to give you," he said. "Some routines work, and those are what stay in the act for years to come. Others flop and you have to keep adapting. Timing is everything — if it doesn't work, you just have to pick yourself up, laugh it off, and keep pushing forward."

This year will mark Harrison's second performance at Hermiston's Farm-City Pro Rodeo, and he's excited to return.

"They always know how to put on a great, authentic show. There's never any smoke-and-mirrors involved," he said. "Everyone is always hospitable, and the crowds are high-energy. I can't wait to come back."

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