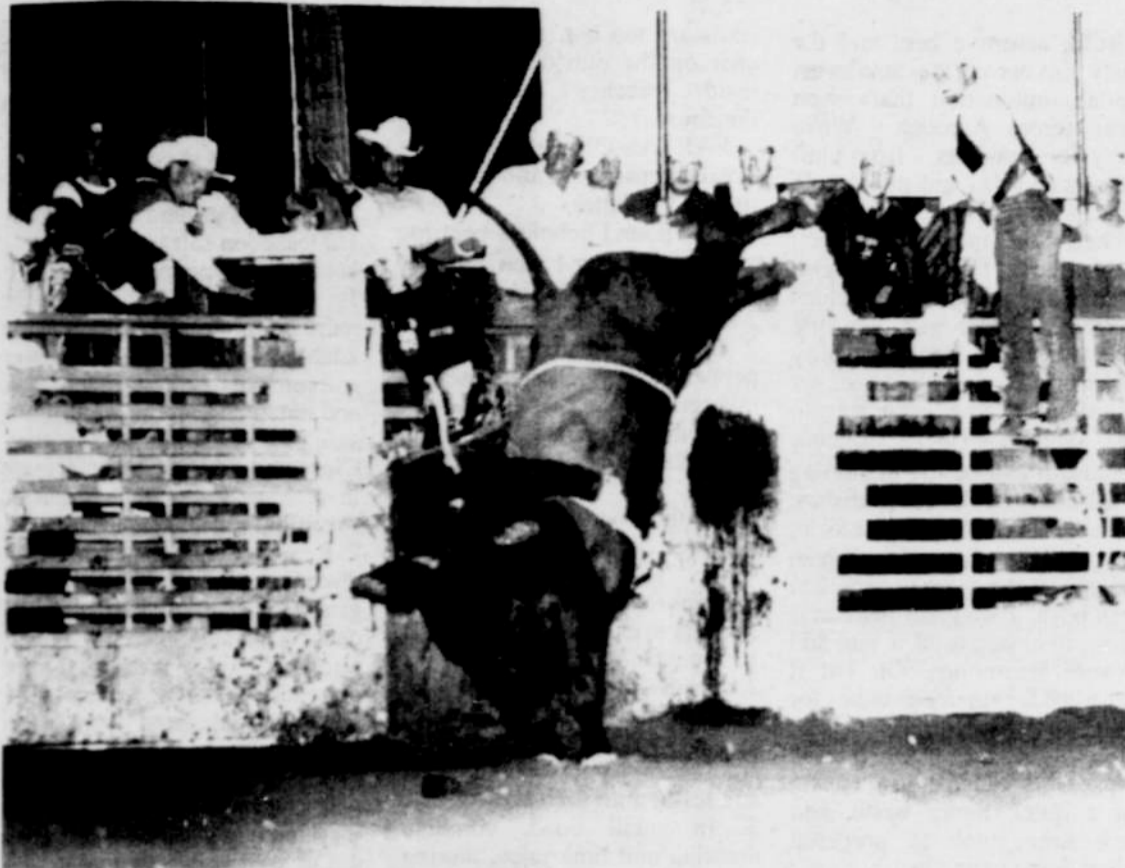


Big Bend Stock will wow OTRP



1997 Bull of the Year, "Rapid Fire", Big Bend Rodeo Co., not ridden successfully in 1997



1997 PRCA Bareback Horse of the Year, "Skool's Spring Fling", Big Bend Rodeo Co.

By Carmen Polk
Pro Rodeo Sports News

In the world of professional rodeo, not all of the stars wear Wrangler jeans.

Some of the four-legged variety prefer a saddle, a rigging or a bull rope. Those stars are professional rodeo's top bucking animals.

Each year, the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association recognizes the sport's top bucking stock. The award winners are

selected on their ability to carry cowboys to high scores or buck off cowboys who try to ride them.

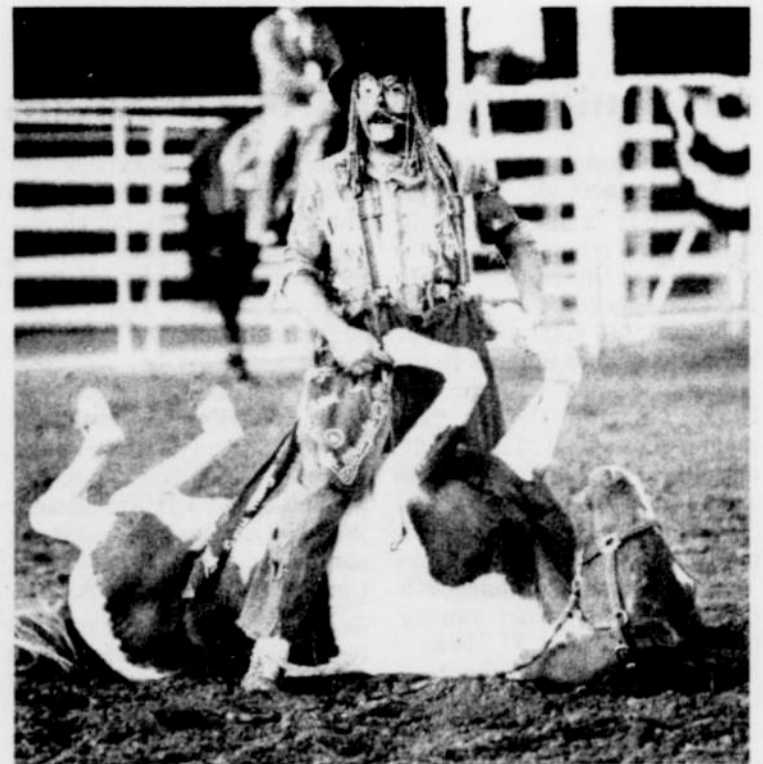
The PRCA's 1997 bareback horse of the year is Skool's Spring Fling, owned by Don Hutsell and Sonny Riley of the Big Bend Rodeo Company in Ritzville, WA.

Spring Fling, the daughter of former NFR horse Spring Rose, is a five year old brown mare who was born to buck. "She just kicks real hard and jumps real high," Hutsell said. "They (cowboys) ei-

ther win the rodeo on her or she bucks them off."

Big Bend purchased Spring Fling as a foal from the Snake River Rodeo Company. At the 1997 DNCFR, she carried Clint Corey to a record-setting 89 point ride. "She could win a title as a saddle bronc too, someday," Corey said. "She's that caliber of horse."

The 1997 saddle bronc of the year is the gray mare Skitso Skoal, owned by stock contractor Ike



The Coppertop Clown

Sankey of Cody, WY. She also won the top-stock award in 1994.

It's no surprise that Skitso Skoal bucks with such great force. She is the granddaughter of Sankey's famous sire Custer, and Rum and Coke, another well-known bronc. Skitso Skoal has also foaled two colts and is pregnant with a third.

"I guess I've thought all along she was an outstanding horse," Sankey said. "She never quits."

Of the 100 riders who have tried to ride Skitso the past three years, only nine have been successful. The few cowboys who rode the eight year old mare for eight seconds usually received scores over 80 points.

The top bucking bull of 1997 also belongs to Big Bend Rodeo Company. Rapid Fire, a 1,600 pound red bull, was raised on Katich Ranch in Keller, WA., and comes from the same herd as famous bulls Dog Face and Bear Swawilla.

Known to go into a clockwise spin immediately after he leaves the chute, Rapid Fire is so fast no

one is completely sure what he does to get the cowboys off his back. "He does a little bit of everything. He's just real rank," Hutsell said.

Rapid Fire was not successfully ridden in PRCA competition in 1997. The last cowboy to ride the bull was David Fournier, who scored 87 points on Rapid Fire during the 1996 NFR.

In the fighting bull pen, the meanest of the mean in 1997 was Howdy Dooty of the Coyote Hills Rodeo company of Hastings, OK. The 1,250 pound Mexican halfbreed blasts out of the chutes low to the ground and looking for a fight.

"The minute you turn him loose, he's going to be looking for someone to hook," said former bull-fighter Rex Dunn, owner of Coyote Hills Rodeo. And Howdy Dooty is special in another way-his owner is only six year old. The bull is part of a pen that Dunn gave to his son, Jace. "He's as excited as anyone about it," Dunn said about Jace.

Fair exhibits accepted Aug. 17

Fair time is here! Exhibits will be accepted on Monday, August 17, from 1-8 p.m.

It is most helpful to the superintendents if you have your exhibitor's tags filled out prior to going to the various departments. Drop by the Fair Office and pick up your premium sheet and exhibitor tags prior to August 17 if possible. That will help you be more prepared come entry time.

The Fair Office will be open Saturday, August 15, from 8 am. until noon for your convenience.

Exhibits will again be released on Saturday night, August 22, from 9-10 p.m.

If you are unable to be present during this time, every effort will

be made to put the exhibits in a locked area to keep them safe. The office will be open on Sunday through Friday the week following fair so that you may pick up your articles.

Karaoke, a fair time favorite

A fairgrounds favorite last year, Karaoke, presented by Tom and Linda Lohuis, will again be featured entertainment at the 1998 Morrow County Fair on Saturday night.

Merlyn Robinson 1998 grand marshal

Merlyn Robinson

This year's Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Grand Marshal is Merlyn Robinson, life-long Heppner

resident and involved in fair and rodeo for many years.

"The Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo showcases our western heritage,

this county's agricultural base and the creativity of many people," says Robinson. "It's an honor to be chosen for this role, but there are many volunteers who have labored to stage these events through the years."

Robinson grew up in Fuller Canyon on the ranch of her parents, Merle and Altha Kirk. As a youngster, she remembers when encephalomyelitis (then called walking disease) took a toll on the horse population. Tractors replaced four-legged horsepower in the fields. The Kirks continued to use horses to work cattle and for pleasure, like the times that she and her sister used horses to escape housework or chores, admits Robinson.

During her school years at Heppner, fair and rodeo were the major community events. Rodeo memories that she recalls from her teen years include summertime princess dances at grange halls, riding horseback to town to carry a parade pennant and entering saddle horse races at rodeos.

Merlyn reigned as the 1947 Fair and Rodeo Queen, following attendance at Oregon State University. Her princesses were Francine Hisler Bristow, Laurel Cannon Palmateer, Corky Nutting Norene and Shirley Wilkinson Ruggs.

Changes mark the history of fair and rodeo. Prior to the acquisition of the current fairgrounds (formerly a Civilian Conservation Corps site), livestock and land products were exhibited in a county-owned wooden shop building near the present library and museum. Nightly rodeo dances were held in the round, wooden pavilion once standing in the Main Street city park area. Rodeo events included hotly contested horse races. Saddle broncs were snubbed, saddled and mounted in the middle of the rodeo arena. Local cowhands and wannabe's were the star performers. The current term of "cowboy up" was just as applicable back then; especially for riders able to remount after biting the dirt. That included some court members, Merlyn laughing recalls.

In the late 1940s, fair and rodeos were regaining momentum after a lapse during World War II years. Minus modern horse trailers, court members' horses were transported in trucks to a few other rodeos. Rodeo board members who rode with courts included Lee Beckner and Harlan McCurdy, Sr. Also on hand to make sure the girls were properly mounted on their horses was Paul Hisler, Sr. Chaperones in 1947 were Wavel Wilkinson and Ruth Nutting.

Since the fall of 1948, Don and Merlyn Robinson have resided in the Sandhollow area on a century



Merlyn Kirk Robinson, queen of the 1947 Morrow County Rodeo

ranch homesteaded in 1884 by Merlyn's maternal grandparents, the M.J. Devins. The Kirk and Robinson Ranches are now managed by their son, Kyle and his wife, Darcy, who have two young sons, Devin and Garrett. Another son, Kirk, and his wife, Delia, live on the Hinton Creek ranch; they have two children, Rondi, who was queen in 1995, and a son, Royal. A daughter, Krynn and her husband, Art Parham, and their son, Mitchell, live in Fresno, CA. Krynn was a fair and rodeo princess in 1977. Merlyn's sister, Evelyn Broun, Hermiston, was a court princess in 1939 for Queen Maxine McCurdy Gilman. At that time, five granges sponsored court members. The one with the most votes at rodeo jitney dances became queen.

As seedstock producers for the cattle industry, the Robinsons are involved in cattle organizations and participate in cattle shows and sales. In addition to membership in other organizations, Merlyn is a charter member of the Wrangler Riding Club. She organized the first club-sponsored cowboy breakfast

during rodeos under the leadership of president Bill Smethurst. Playdays, overnight trail rides and horse shows were club activities enjoyed by the Robinson family. Merlyn's horse interests have included raising colts, training and horse showing.

"It's been a privilege to work with 4-H horse members through the years," says Robinson. She has also presided as a horse judge at Northwest horse shows. A former fair committee member, she served 10 years on the fair board. And she continues to be involved in fair events, including 4-H and open horse shows. Robinson has been a 4-H leader for 29 years.

Merlyn also still writes articles to promote the rodeo and is a contributor for several publications, including the electric co-op's "Ruralite" and the Heppner Gazette-Times.

In 1997, Merlyn was chosen as the Heppner Chamber of Commerce Woman of the Year.

"Living in a rural close-knit community where volunteers work together to make things happen is a rewarding lifestyle," says Robinson.

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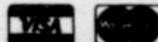
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