

Talent and fond memories still live on in the Neil Beamer Memorial

By Sue Gibbs

Laughter, friends and a love for roping best describe a special man named Neil Beamer. Many people in Morrow County and surrounding areas were proud to know Neil. He was a talented man who had a love for ranch life and rodeo.

Neil was born in the Heppner Hospital on June 20, 1936. As a child, instead of playing ball or marbles like many young boys did,

he loved to play with ropes. This obsession as a child turned into a love of calf roping by time Neil was 12 years old. Neil Beamer soon felt the desire to press his boundaries and begin competing in this sport.

He grew up on the Balm Fork ranch and this is where he began testing his skills. Ropings were held at the ranch for friends and family to gather, rope and test

their individual skills. It was said that as a young man Neil was amazed that all the "old guys" could beat him roping. Cornett Green of Heppner (now deceased) bet Neil that he could beat him roping and in a foot race from the arena to the house. Well, Neil lost on both accounts but he also learned a lot from those years. Soon Neil branched out to other competitions at the local "Wranglers" riding club and local ropings.

His education started in Heppner. He went to primary and junior high in the old junior high building that was recently torn down this summer. He graduated from Heppner High School and furthered his education in both LaGrande and Portland. He majored in ag business and then returned to the ranch on Balm Fork, but his favorite spot was their ranch in Ukiah. He spent a great deal of time at this ranch and ran about 250 pair. His education improved but he never left his love of roping.

His roping progressed over the years. He competed in many large rodeos such as Joseph, The Pendleton Round-Up, the Cow Palace, and at Portland and many others around the Pacific Northwest. His top honor included the 1965 North West Calf Roping Champion. This included Oregon, Idaho, Washington and California. He won numerous saddles, blankets and buckles. All these proved that Neil was truly a great roper. However, one of his most cherished trophies was in 1958 when he won the

Amateur Calf Roping Saddle in his hometown of Heppner. This award always held a special place in Neil's heart.

All those awards showed Neil's talent but he also knew he was blessed with awesome horses to complete his roping talent. Several horses were special to Neil. "Grey" was a horse that brought home many of those saddles and buckles in his early years of roping. "Mackey" was a horse with drive and stamina. Neil and Mackey were a true team. "Toni" is still at the Balm Fork ranch. Today he gives rides to the occasional small child, but in his time he shone above all other horses at a rodeo. Most other horses in the arena had their heads low and relaxed, but not Toni; his head was always held high and his ears forward watching the action. He loved to be ridden. "I never had to break Toni because he just loved to be ridden," this was a statement from Neil himself. This horse never missed a trick and his place was with Neil calf roping and riding. They both had the passion and love for calf roping.

Neil loved kids and he wanted to share his talent with them. He often spent time helping kids learn to rope. He shared his talent at Wranglers and with any kid who had the desire. His wife Janet told a story about one of those kids. This "kid" would go to the ranch real early in the morning, knock on Neil's window, get him up and have Neil run some calves for him before school. This young individual was Jerry Gentry. Neil always was willing to help as long as the kid had the drive to learn how to rope. He helped out any way he could. In 1978, when a young roper came across some hard times with his good roping horse, Neil was there to lend his roping horse "Handy" to the roper. He helped haul him from rodeo to rodeo that year. All the efforts paid off because this young roper, Kyle Robinson, made the NRA finals that year. Neil's talent lives on through these



Neil Beamer



Neil Beamer showing his skill at calf roping

individuals.

People loved Neil because he was a quiet man who was friendly to everyone. He never expected much from people and his kindness showed. He enjoyed the simple things in life the best. He enjoyed the mountains and his "beautiful whispering pines" at the Ukiah ranch. Neil was known for his brief but comical stories because he loved to hear people laugh. Elk, deer and bird hunting were other sports he enjoyed, but he looked forward to the roar of the rodeo crowd on the weekends.

Neil passed away from diabetes in 1995 at the age of 59. His talent and fond memories still live on and a memorial award is given each year at the Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo in memory of this Heppner resident and his love for the sport. The Neil Beamer Memorial Spurs are given to the fastest calf roper in the Pro Rodeo show. It is an award that any calf roper is honored to receive.

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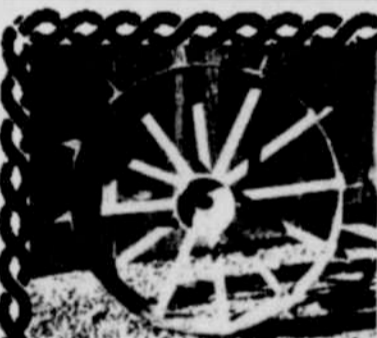
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