

Cowboys at Work and Play

THE WRCA. BY BEVERLY DAVIS

Only honest-to-God working cowboys need apply. The Working Ranch Cowboy Association will accept nothing less. To compete in a WRCA-sanctioned rodeo, cowboys and their families must meet strict criteria proving that they actually earn their living working on ranches. And that's precisely what makes the WRCA rodeos so unique.

Ranch teams compete at WRCA-sanctioned rodeos all over the country. Winning at any one of them entitles the team to compete in the yearly WRCA World Championship Rodeo in Amarillo, Texas, in November. Often, whole families compete.

To attend one of these rodeos is to see that the real cowboy lifestyle and heritage is, in fact, being passed on

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ABOVE: Team from Sandhill Cattle, Earth, Texas, and Black Cattle Co., Hereford, Texas, are catching the bovine for Cattle Doctoring.

LEFT: Wild Cow Milking, La Mejor Livestock, Seymour, Texas and Mayo Ranches, Petrolia, Texas.

OPPOSITE: Cowboy from the Pitchfork Ranch in West Texas, watches a buddy shoe a horse.

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to future generations. And it's not just regional, either. Last year the competing teams came from South Dakota, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Arizona and Nevada. The wide diversity is apparent in everything from the lengths of ropes they use to the types of hats they wear.

But while these ranch families are fierce competitors in the rodeo arena, they become partners in furthering the mission of the WRCA, which is to preserve the heritage and lifestyle of the working ranch cowboy; promote ranching on a national level; produce a World Championship Ranch Rodeo; and provide assistance to cowboys and their families in times of need through the Working Ranch Cowboys Foundation.

It all started in 1995 when 18 ranch owners, foremen and actual ranch cowboys joined men and women from other walks of life who shared their interest in keeping the cowboy heritage alive in a fast-changing world. Initially there were 200 founding members. Since then, the active membership has grown to more than 1,800. That membership has raised nearly a quarter million dollars. More

LEFT: Ranch Bronc Riding, Lee Hart, D & M Cattle Co. from Greeley, Kansas.

BELOW: Wild Cow Milking, Ute Lake Ranch, Logan, New Mexico and Yolo Ranch, Prescott, Arizona.





Pitchfork Ranch, West Texas. When the cowboys go out with the wagon they live in teepees and congregate in big tents for chuck and coffee-time. If they get lucky enough to win some Working Ranch Cowboys Association events, they might make it to the finals in Amarillo, Texas in November.

than \$160,000 has been distributed through the crisis fund to injured or ill cowboys or their family members for medical bills. An additional \$82,000 has been given through the scholarship fund to students from ranch families to help pay college costs for the veterinarians and ranch managers of tomorrow.

The championship rodeo funds those

efforts. Last year, it raffled a saddle handcrafted by John “The Saddleman” Morgan. Artist Gary Morton supplied a limited-edition painting, “Texas Puncher Poets” to help raise funds for WRCA. The auctions at the rodeo feature everything from cowhide gear bags from K Bar J Leather to rope creations from Dutton Rope Designs.

The WRCA effectively speaks for that special breed of big-hearted, hard-working, independent-thinking Americans—the contemporary working cowboys and their families. Mandy Morton is association manager of WRCA.

“The cowboy isn’t going away,” she says. “You just can’t see him from the road.” ■



“Texas Puncher Poets” by Gary Morton was commissioned to help raise funds for the Working Ranch Cowboys Foundation Scholarship and Crisis Fund. Morton is an artist, a cowboy and former wagon boss on the historic Bell Ranch in New Mexico. He says he paints “to honor the working cowboy.” This print is 11”x32” and costs \$100 each. The poets are, left to right: Larry McWhorter, Buster McLaury, Buck Ramsey, J.B. Allen and Joel Nelson. Send \$100 per print to: WRCA, P.O. Box 7765, Amarillo, TX 79114.