



Diamond G

OUT OF THE CHUTE

Lewis Field

Profile of a Pro Rodeo Cowboy

THE AIR ABOVE THE CHUTE is heavy with sweat and fear as he slides his boots along the flanks of the animal and settles in, wrapping practiced fingers around the strap that separates him from the whims of the animal beneath. The encounter to come may well represent the last level playing field between man and the forces of nature he has learned to control so well. It is a struggle that the mount will win as often as the rider; but this cowboy has little time to reflect on the greater meaning of his looming ride. The bell is about to sound, and ahead waits nothing less than a few seconds of breathless, heart-stopping insanity.

It is a scenario that Lewis Field knows well. As a five-time world rodeo champion, the Beehive State native has spent more than his fair share of time in a bronco chute – and a lot of time picking himself up off this field of dreams as well, this dusty arena floor pocked by thundering hooves and boot heels.

"I got started as a young boy growing up on a ranch," Field recalls. "I can remember seeing as a young boy a rodeo in Oakley, Utah. As a boy three, four, five years old, it was something that intrigued me – I knew even then that it was something I wanted to do."

It didn't take long for Field, who would one day join Steve and Cyndi Gilbert in forming the Diamond G Rodeo Company, to get his chance. By the time he had completed studying and competing at then Utah Valley Community College and Weber State College, he was ready to join the professional rodeo ranks – and to make an instant impression as well. Named Rookie of the Year in 1980, the season he turned professional, he would go on to qualify for the national finals the next 11 years running in his arena specialty – bareback riding.

Field captured the Professional Rodeo Circuit Association's international bareback championship in 1985 and 1986, then added three straight world all-around titles from 1985 to 1987. The globe's reigning prince of the cowboys, he was destined for arena immortality; and that honor came in 1991 with his retirement and induction into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Champions in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

"I was 35 years old – the youngest one ever inducted who hadn't been killed," Field said with a smile.

Looking back on a stellar career, the decorated Utah cowboy says his success is probably the result of his diversity – an ability to compete will in both the rodeo's bareback and saddle bronc events.

"In bareback, you're hanging on to what amounts to a suitcase handle. Your feet are free and there's nothing on the horse's head. It's a very physical event; it's hard on your back, your arm, everything else – it's wide open and wild.

"In the other event, you're sitting in a saddle with a rope attached to a halter on the horse's head. It's not as wild as the bareback, but the technique is more demanding."

"I was more successful at bareback, but I did well in saddles too," he said. "And that was one of the things that complemented my career. If I didn't win in one, I could win in the other – and that made for a more steady type of income."

As a dedicated family man, steady wages were important to Field – but the world champion is quick to remind that earning a salary on the pro rodeo circuit is definitely not for the faint of heart.

"Everything happens so fast, it's just a blur. It's just a lot of action that you don't have anything to do with other than just being there."

One might expect any of Field's five world titles to be his most cherished rodeo memories, but not so. He remembers best, he says, events a little closer to home.

"I remember in 1982 when I met my wife, Veronica, at a rodeo in California, and I remember winning the all-around at Frontier Days in Wyoming," he said. "That was the day we decided to get married; it was a fun day."

And that, according to one of Utah's most decorated professional cowboys, is the gem at the heart of all rodeo competition. Very few people will attain the heights that Lewis Field has scaled in this arena of dreams; but the rewards to be gained in conquering one's own fear, in taking on the primordial challenge of man against beast, are rewards well worth the effort.

"This is a sport – and like any other professional sport, you don't get there overnight. It takes a lot of practice and dedication to become a professional cowboy on the pro rodeo circuit. But at the same time, there is a lot of accomplishment to be gained by just competing. It takes an extraordinary amount of courage just to get on an animal in the chute and tell them to open up and let you try it.

"A guy may try and not do well, but he can say, 'If I drop my head and can ride this brahma bull or this bucking bronc, I can go out and get this job.' It's something you don't have to be successful doing to benefit from."



came down to the hunters' camp. The dogs signaled his arrival when they ran into the tents and tried to climb into the bed rolls. Crack Foot's tracks were later found within twenty-five yards of the tents.

Due to continued hunter failure to capture or kill Crack Foot, the Forest Service brought in a sixty pound bear trap to set near his latest kill. He proved too wise or too lucky to step into it. Among Crack Foot's kills was a bull that Ranger Moody found dragging his entrails. Milt shot the bull to get it out of its misery and followed its trail to a point where there was much blood and hair. It appeared that the bull and the bear met and neither would give the trail so the bear took a swipe with his forepaw and let out the bull's entrails. Another kill was a three year old steer whose skull looked as if it had been hit with a sledge hammer. District employees poisoned the kills, but Crack Foot always seemed to sense danger and would roll the poisoned carcass over and not eat.

Late on a Saturday afternoon in September 1909, as Milt returned from the top of Pine Valley Mountain where he had been stamping timber, he ran across Crack Foot's tracks crossing a small stream. Above the bank on dry ground, the track marks were still wet, indicating that the bear had crossed very recently.



Milt Moody, a ranger on the Dixie National Forest, tracked the notorious bear for more than two years before defeating him in Pine Valley in 1909.

Milt immediately took up the trail. It proved difficult to follow as a bear track is much like that of a barefoot man, and therefore, hard to see. So Milt looked for displaced rocks or broken blades of grass.

Then suddenly he heard crashing in the timber. Milt could not actually see the bear but he was so close that he took a chance shot in the direction of the noise. Believing that he knew where Crack Foot would come through, Milt made for the spot to cut him off. He waited on the trail until after dark, but the bear did not come that way.

The next morning, Milt returned to where he had shot at the bear. Shortly after picking up the tracks, he was surprised to find blood on the trail; his bullet had found its mark. He followed the blood trail down the mountain to a place "so

rough a bird could hardly fly." Hurrying around to the far side of the canyon by way of a passable trail, he found that the bear had not come out.

Moody rode to Pine Valley to tell the stockmen that he believed with some help they could get Crack Foot the next morning. Four men answered the call to assist. They located some "very fresh tracks," which they soon lost. It was decided to split the party and to circle to find the trail. The first man to find the track was to

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Bears are rare – but beware!

By Lynn Chamberlain

Utah Department of Wildlife Resources

Bears are not common in southwest Utah, however, an occasional black bear may appear now and then in mountain areas. They have a natural tendency to avoid humans but they are attracted to odors such as those from human food, pet food, garbage, hummingbird feeders, toothpaste, suntan lotion, and insect repellent. For the safety of people and of the bears, there are a few precautions to follow when in southwest Utah's mountains.

Generally, a food free area is a bear free area. The primary activity of bears is hunting for

food. If they do not find anything to eat, they move on. People should keep their camps and cabins clean and their food stored in a sealed container.

A good rule to remember is to never feed a bear to lure it closer or to photograph it — It usually works.

If hiking in dense vegetation, such as that found along stream banks, make noise to alert bears to your presence. They don't like to be surprised.

If you encounter a bear, make noise; yell, clap your hands, bang pots, and throw rocks to scare it away. Never

approach a bear or let it approach you. If it does approach you, retreat slowly or climb a tree. If you are attacked and cannot get away, fight back, kick, scream, yell — be aggressive.

While they are rare, black bears are a natural part of the environment that makes our area so attractive. Human encounters with bears are uncommon, and with a few precautions you may never see one.



Lynn Chamberlain