

# DIAMOND G

## RODEO

STEVE & CYNDI GILBERT

Article By Lori O'Hawer

TOQUERVILLE, Utah – On 270,000 acres of private, leased and public lands that make up the Diamond G Ranches in the southwest corner of Utah, Steve and Cyndi Gilbert's blue blooded bucking bulls and horses roam the rugged ranges against the backdrop of the Zion National Forest and Pine Valley Mountains.

The Gilbert's breeding program focuses primarily on bulls for several reasons.

Practically, the desert ranges in their country aren't conducive to raising horses. A much slower growing crop that requires lush grasslands or deeply supplemented feeding to sustain them until they reach maturity, which the Gilbert philosophy defines as 5-7 years old.

Personally, while horses are a distinct passion of Steve's, the bull riding and fighting aspects of rodeo drew him as a young man. At just 21, the combination would end both careers.

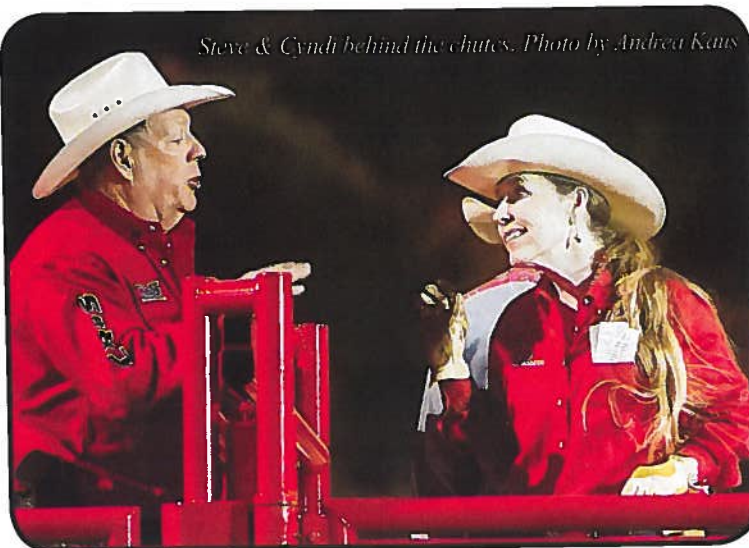
"I was fighting bulls at a rodeo I was entered at, so they ran mine in as the last of the night," Gilbert recalls. "I was gettin' off, but trying to be funny about it, and do a backflip off of him as I came out the back door. He threw me in the air, then came around and hooked me in the back. It broke it."

In the true tradition of cowboys, it wasn't an injury that was going to keep him down for long. At the time, Gilbert was working for A1 Asphalt running a Cat Loader in Las Vegas during one of the town's perennial building booms.

"I'd get in the bucket of another machine and the opera-

tor would lift me onto the cab of mine. I'd stay there for the rest of the work day and be lifted down again at quitting time because I couldn't climb," he said.

The abrupt end to what fueled the young cowboy's passion probably played a huge role in Gilbert's determination to return to rodeo when the timing was right.



Steve & Cyndi behind the chutes. Photo by Andrea Kaus

After establishing the construction company that broke ceilings in the Las Vegas construction market and diversifying into heavy equipment manufacturing, rental and sales and mining, he met a smart, talented young lawyer during a court proceeding. Cyndi came from a ranching family but staying in ranching wasn't part of her dream.

"I wasn't and still don't consider myself any kind of cowgirl," said Cyndi. "I planned and worked to be in business for myself a long way from the family ranching operation. I grew up around cowboys through school and wasn't interested in the lifestyle at all."

Steve and Cyndi kept in touch after the trial that introduced them was settled. The friends would marry after 2 years of studied resistance to honeymoon in Las Vegas during what's come to be known as Rodeo Week.

"I'd never been, so was excited to go," Cyndi says. "When I watched my husband catch fire during the bull riding, I knew that something more than being spectators was probably in store."

One year later, the couple bought four bulls, among them the great bull Ricky, and one buckskin bareback horse branded EZ at the World Famous Benny Binion



T92. Marj's Rose was always a cowboy favorite. Photo by Andrea Kaus.

Bucking Stock Sale. It would be the start of one of the most successful and perhaps, atypical rodeo companies producing today.

By virtue of those other successful businesses and concerns in the Gilbert's portfolio, the rodeo company isn't dependent on multiple contracts and a full season of bookings to sustain itself. The Gilberts' combined passion for the sport and their stock lends itself to a unique philosophy in event production. They are extremely selective in terms of which rodeos they produce, preferring high quality and strict professionalism over sheer quantity.

Among their contracts is Salt Lake City's Days of '47 Rodeo. A favorite is the Tuahcan PBR Touring Pro event held in Ivins, Utah. The venue is designed for fine arts; concerts, musicals and stage productions. Bringing a bull riding event to life on stage was both challenging and satisfying.

On the cattle side of the operation, young heifers are always crossed onto a Longhorn bull for that critical first calving.

"We found that the bigger, Charbray bulls crossed onto the heifers made it extremely difficult in calving," said Cyndi. "We had Painted Desert, an good using Longhorn bull in our string and started breeding him. This all but eliminated mortality in our good heifers and produced several outstanding individuals."

Attention to details like that is not just a financial decision, but a humanitarian one. Good for the business and the sport. Sound management

practices combined with a strong sense of direction and the gift of vision have produced impressive results.

In 2001, Diamond G's homebred bull Mr. USA set the existing Wrangler National Finals Rodeo arena record under Cody Hancock for 96 points.

The couple credits not only attention to great genetics, successful crosses, detailed record keeping and the backbone of their ranching operation with their ranch hands. Their well-honed, collective abilities to recognize greatness in an animal and the rugged terrain on the Diamond G Ranches all contribute.

In the desert/mountainous vegetation of their country, they supplement feed year round from their 500 acre hay fields, making certain the feed areas and watering areas are separated by distance and the rough hills the stock must cross. This builds dense bone and muscle that serves them well in terms of performance and longevity throughout their entire careers.

Their horse remuda is managed much the same way, although raising bucking horses isn't what they do because of the time and subsequent expense required to raise them. The Gilberts depend on purchasing select

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T63. Photo by Andrea Kaus.



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stock as 5-7 year olds and focus on management and the time honored horseman's skills to bring them along and keep them performing at their peak.

In 2015, a trifecta of great rides aboard Diamond G Rodeo horses set a high bar in the sport. They're quick to credit the talent of Jake and Cody Wright along with brother-in-law CoBurn Bradshaw for the phenomenon that saw the top three places at Cedar City, Utah, marked 91 for Bradshaw aboard Marla's Rose, and a pair of 90s to split second and third between Jake Wright on Lukas Gone Wild and Cody Wright on Black Knight.

Black Knight reared in the chute breaking Cyndi's finger and thumb during that performance. She weathered that storm and went on to flank the rest of the rodeo. Over the past 20 years of the Diamond G Rodeos company, Cyndi has flanked all of their horses and bulls. Like any good flanker, she knows their preferences and handles them quietly and efficiently. Unlike her brethren, her rightful place on the platform isn't welcomed by all. The glass ceiling for women in the PRCA is cracking, but it's a long way from broken down.

"Last fall, a few days before the WNFR, the Wright boys came here to tune up," said Steve. "Jake and CoBurn Bradshaw asked for the toughest horses in the string. We were happy to help. The two were bucked off a lot and got out of the dirt calling for more."

"If I can ride these, I can ride everything at the WNFK," CoBurn Bradshaw told them.

The newest member of the Riding Wright Family (by marriage) impressed the world at the 2015 event by winning 2 rounds handily and successfully covering all 10 of the horses drawn for him.

The Gilberts are fond of the great broncs of the north country, preferring the bloodlines established by the iconic Tooke breeding program, Brookman's and Calgary Stampede. They found a kindred mind in Rozet, Wyoming's Brian Gifford and purchased 30 head from him and his family.

"90% of those horses bucked," said Cyndi, the

keeper of records and Diamond G's top analyst. "That is an outstanding percentage and a credit to the Gifford program."

For three years, the Gilberts leased Bradley Brettin's prestigious stallion, War Paint. To date, the most famous and prolific son of War Paint is Burch's Lunatic Fringe. Many horses from that bloodline included Raindance and Lots 'a Fun.

In January, Steve made the trip 'back east' to Guthrie, Oklahoma's IPRA/Joe. Simon Bucking Stock Sale. He added two bulls, six horses and three pickup horses to the company's assets in what he described as a buyer's market.

Simon's stallion Blue Eyes has sired horses who fit well in the Gilbert's string. He added a few more from that line as well as others from War Dance, descendants of Brother Baldy on the maternal side and Empty Pockets.

"I pay attention to conformation like any horseman, but it's not always a determining factor. I prefer horses in the 1200# to 1300# range. Too many Thoroughbred and the horse won't hold up well over the course of his career. Similarly, too much draft blood. I look for good, solid, correct legs and a good hip."

The Gilberts insist that contestants handle all of their stock properly during every Diamond G performance. All of their stock stays under their watchful eye to be certain the love of the bucking isn't dimmed by over cinching, soaking, failure to leave the chute in a timely manner or rough handling of any sort.

"It's easy to see the riders who are stockmen and those who are just riders," Cyndi said. "We make sure they leave our rodeos with a little better sense of stockmanship. It's important to the longevity of our stock and important to us personally."

The Diamond G operations are truly a collective effort by the husband and wife team. Cyndi keeps detailed records that include genetics, bucking styles and other information important to management and production.

