

## Cream of the Crop

Half of this year's AQHA-Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Horse of the Year winners have won the award before; the others are receiving it for the first time.

By Megan Alpers and Becky Newell

Rodeo's timed-event cowboys and cowgirls – the ropers, steer wrestlers and barrel racers – owe a lot of their success to their horses. But the horses can't wear those big gold buckles that their riders win. So AQHA and the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association have teamed up for the last 17 years to recognize the top horses in tie-down roping, steer roping, steer wrestling, team roping, and barrel racing.

Nominated by their owners, riders or fans, these horses are voted on by the top 25 contestants in their respective events. The first-place winners receive a cash prize and an AQHA bronze, and they also have a notation added to their AQHA records. Cash prizes will be presented to the owners of the second- and third-place horses.

All the winners, except the steer roping horse of the year, receive their awards at a banquet during the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in December in Las Vegas. The 2005 steer roping horse of the year will be introduced and receive his trophy at the National Finals Steer Roping in November in Amarillo.

## **BARREL RACING**

### **Sparky Impression**

As she heads for her very first NFR, 62-year-old June Holeman has only one regret.

“I should have tried this 15 or 20 years ago when my back and my reflexes were better and I was more aggressive,” she says.

But thanks to this year’s barrel horse of the year, Sparky Impression, aka “Sparky,” the Arcadia, Nebraska, cowgirl will be competing in Las Vegas come December.

At 14.2 hands and 1,000 pounds, the 17-year-old “Sparky,” a grandson of Impressive, is small, but mighty.

“I got him five years ago from my girlfriend, Sheryl DeGroft,” June says. “Oh he’s very, very cute. You can’t help but be attracted to him. Sheryl knows her horses. When she says he can run very hard, you better believe it. I just had to get him smoothed up, and he got to placing right away at the amateur shows.”

The pair has won more than \$150,000 in the five years they’ve been together. In 2005 alone, they traveled 60,000 miles.

“We didn’t win a lot of rodeos, but we placed at a lot of rodeos,” says June, who has trained barrel horses nearly all her life. “He has gone way beyond the call of duty.”

IMPRESSIVE s 69

BARNONE IMPRESSIVE ch 76

SURE CLASS ch 76

### **SPARKY IMPRESSION**

1989 chestnut gelding

SOKOTA BABE s 62

SOKOTA SPARKY s 72

SPARKY NOTE s 67

## **STEER WRESTLING**

### **FF Zans A Baron Jack**

“Seriously?” was Jim Burks’ only reply when we called to congratulate him on his horse, FF Zans A Baron Jack, being named the steer wrestling horse of the year again.

“I just never dreamed that he’d win it a second time,” Jim said, as if he was more excited about this award than when “Zan” won it the first time last year. “He has had a good year, probably a little better than he had last year.”

But because predicting the horse of the year winners is, well, pretty unpredictable, the heavy-equipment salesman from Arkansas didn’t think he’d get bragging rights two years in a row. Evidently, the top 25 steer wrestlers thought Zan deserved the award.

Maybe that’s because his primary pilot, Ronnie Fields, is sitting in second place in the world standings on his way to his second NFR. The Oklahoma cowboy was in fifth place heading into the Finals at this time last year.

“It’s a good accomplishment for the Burks family to have that caliber of a horse and for him to stay sound,” Ronnie says. “There have been four guys that have ridden him at every rodeo he goes to, and then there are usually three or four other guys outside of us that ride him at different rodeos. He’s a special horse; he’s unique. He has never not given it his all.”

Zan is also the main mount for Chancey Larson, Jon Ragatz and Jim’s son, Rodney, who is Zan’s chauffeur and hazer. The hazer – the guy who’s horseback on the opposite side of the steer – keeps the steer running straight for the steer wrestler.

“Zan just loves what he’s doing. He hates to be standing around not doing anything,” says Rodney. “I’ve heard all my life about horses that just love what they are doing. I really believe it now that I’ve seen Zan do what he does.”

With changes in professional rodeo that cut back the number of rodeos required of the cowboys, Rodney thinks he’ll get two or three more good years out of Zan before he retires the gelding.

“He is probably going to stay here in Arkansas the rest of his life,” Rodney says. “He doesn’t owe us anything.”

ZAN PARR BAR ch 74

ZAN SUGAR PARR s 88

SWEETER THAN ch 70

By Sugar Bars

### **FF ZANS A BARON JACK**

1994 sorrel gelding

SIR BARON JACK s 77

THREE BELLE STAR ch 82

FLOSSIE JACKIE s 78

## **TEAM ROPING – HEELING**

### **Pets Ten**

Rich Skelton is one of the few professional cowboys who have owned more than one horse that has picked up a horse of the year award.

His longtime mount, Boons Smooth Val, aka “Roany,” has won the award four times, and Pets Ten, aka “Chili Dog,” has snagged the award for the second time. Chili Dog stepped in for an injured Roany in 2003.

“It’s pretty neat to have two horses that have won it,” Rich says. “I’ve been fortunate and had good horses at the right time in my career.”

And nobody understands timing like Rich and his partner, header Speed Williams.

The pair made PRCA history last year as they won a record eighth consecutive world team roping championship at the NFR. Yet Rich doesn’t hesitate to acknowledge his *other* teammate, 10-year-old Chili Dog.

“The thing about him is that he’s pretty laidback, and he does just about whatever you want,” Rich says. “He’s just really solid, and he does the same thing every day.”

Chili Dog had some big shoes to fill when he replaced Roany, but he stepped up to the challenge and has hit the ground running.

“He’s just getting into his prime now, and he should be good for a long time,” Rich says. “I’ve got some other horses that I can take to some smaller rodeos next year and kind of save him and just take him to the best rodeos.”

And one of those rodeos will be the NFR, where he and Speed will defend their world championship title.

DOCS VOYAGER pal 76

By Doc Bar

TEN O SEA bkn 90

DAVIE O LENA bay 79

By Doc O’Lena

### **PETS TEN**

1995 chestnut gelding

BLACK CHICK GOLD brn 79

ONE O THREE CHICK bay 86

LADY ONE O THREE red 77

## **TIE-DOWN ROPING**

### **Topofthemarket**

When describing tie-down horse of the year Topofthemarket, Stran Smith says he's just like any other big-time athlete.

"He reminds me a lot of somebody like (professional baseball player) Roger Clemens. Roger's a big guy that is pretty laidback, pretty mellow, until it comes to game time, and then he's 'The Rocket,' " Stran says. "That's the way 'Topper' is. He's pretty laidback and pretty mellow until it's game time, and then he turns into Topper. He knows when the heat is on, and that's when he works his best – whenever you need him the worst."

Even though the 23-year-old gelding has been a full-time rodeo horse since 1990, he shows no signs of slowing down. According to Stran, the duo has improved since the gelding was named horse of the year for the first time two years ago.

"In 2003, he was my only horse," he says. "I rode him at every rodeo. That was after I had come back from heart surgery, and I had a lot of rodeos to go to, and I was going to one and two a day. This year, I have been a little more selective of where I have ridden him."

Stran credits much of his success this year to Topper's talent and looks forward to many more seasons with his horse.

"He makes good (runs) better, and he makes bad ones good," Stran says. "He doesn't know anything but 100 percent. He gives you everything he has every time. As long as he continues to want to do this, I'm all about that. I'm more than willing to take him. As long as he stays fit and sound, I'm going to rodeo on him."

Topper has earned his place in the Smith family and loves to be around people.

"Anytime you eat at a place that has after-dinner mints, you always load up on them because Topper will come knock you down trying to get a peppermint out of your hand," Stran says, laughing. "He's just so likable, not only because of who he is and what he does, he's just got his own personality."

Stran adds that this award is a great acknowledgment of one of the finest rodeo horses in history.

"It's no credit to me; it's just credit to him. All I do is get a chance to win first every time I nod my head because I'm getting to ride him."

CORNER THE MARKET (TB) ch 65

KAWEAH MARKET s 78

KAWEAH PITTIPAT bay 66

### **TOPOFTHEMARKET**

1982 sorrel gelding

HESA BLUE BOY gr 66

SCATTY rro 74

PISTOL'S DAISY dun 68

## **STEER ROPING**

### **Bobs Lena**

Perhaps it's not surprising that Cash Myers, a strong contender for this year's all-around cowboy title, owns a horse that once belonged to three-time all-around cowboy Trevor Brazile.

It's also no surprise that Bobs Lena, who in his formative years was trained and ridden by Trevor, is this year's steer roping horse of the year.

"I competed on him in heading, heeling, calf roping and steer roping in pro rodeos, and I rode him at the timed-event finals," Trevor says. "He was the first horse off the T-Cross Ranch that I had been around. He's definitely a success that Robert Norris has raised off that T-Cross Ranch."

Norris, an AQHA past president and rancher from Colorado, is the grandfather of Trevor's wife, Shada. In fact, it was Shada who picked "Tarzan" out of the ranch's herd for Trevor to ride.

"Bobs Lena's nickname was 'Little Bob,' " Trevor adds. "Mr. Norris has a thing of calling all of his horses 'Bob.' That way, he never forgets their name ... one's 'Little Bob,' another is regular 'Bob.' "

Somehow, Little Bob's name got changed to "Tarzan."

"With Trevor, who knows how?" says Cash, who bought the 13-year-old gelding from roper Allen Bach.

"Allen used him as a head horse, heel horse and calf horse for his son," Cash says. "The horse was really, really versatile. When I got him, I was hurt and wasn't roping calves very much, but I was tripping some steers. Man, we got along great. He has really, really been super strong and easy to ride.

"He's really, really quiet, and easy to get along with," says Cash. "My nieces and nephews ride him. My wife, Lacey, has told me he's the only one at the house I can't get rid of because she can head steers on him. He's really as much a part of the family as any horse I've ever had."

OTOE s 60

By Sugar Bars

TEE CROSS s 64

FOXY BUCK s 55

### **BOBS LENA**

1992 sorrel gelding

DOC O'LENA bay 67

By Doc Bar

JEZ O LENA s 77

HEART BAR JEZZY s 71

**TEAM ROPING – HEADING**

**Docalickin**

DOC'S DEMONSTRATOR ch 70

By Doc Bar

WOODLAND DOC pal 78

MISS PALLY BAR pal 70

**DOCALICKIN**

1992 black gelding

GIVEMALICKIN blk 80

By Dash For Cash

OLE LADY CASH blk 85

OLE LADY BUZZ BAR s 80