

The year was 1979 and I had been hired to work for Wild Horse Valley in Napa, California. My job was to run the training program, which consisted of managing and developing the race horses (our main source of revenue) in addition to overseeing the cutting horse operation. The cutting horses belonged to the ranch as well as some outside clients we had.

According to our agreement, I was to show all the cutting horses for them, and I was all too happy to do it. I had the bug bad in those early days and couldn't wait to get after it.

We trained a lot of horses for the Starlight Ranch in Laytonville, California. John Hargus owned the ranch and had a lot of quarter racing horses. However, being a rancher all his life, he loved the cutting horses very much and wanted to make his mark in the industry on a national level.

I had purchased the great Doc Bar mare *Fizzabar* from Don Dodge and an NCHA Futurity prospect named *Doc Date Bar* from Bobby Ingersol. John wanted me to show *Fizzabar* so she could finish in the top ten of the NCHA that year. Our show schedule included going to Vancouver, BC, which was a big show and my first chance ever to show internationally. There was only one slight problem... When I called about entering the contest, I was told that I had to be there the next morning to meet the entry deadline, and there was no way on earth I could make the trip in that amount of time. Of course, the best way to make something happen is to tell me it can't be done. I've always loved a challenge! So, I loaded up and took off to prove them wrong.

I decided to take *Date Bar* along for some experience on the road and to get her seasoned for the upcoming Futurity in Ft. Worth that December. I knew that it would be to my advantage when the time came, she would be used to all the commotion and hoopla without actually having to show in the pen. Asking a youngster to maintain their focus in that type of environment for the first time without ever leaving the ranch until the big show, is a major mistake that too many folks have made and lived to regret. It can be mighty overwhelming for them.

Anyway, after driving straight through for over 2000 miles, I arrived in Vancouver and was met by a very pleasant surprise. I had shown at the Cow Palace and several other great places around the country, but nothing prepared me for the beauty and impressiveness of this show complex, it was amazing! As I pulled up to the Coliseum, two men approached me in a golf cart with a little bed on the back of it. They were well dressed with red sport coats and big smiles. The folks running the show had been expecting me on the off chance I was able to pull it off and were ready to assist me any way they could. (Truthfully, they were pretty surprised to see me, but ready to welcome me nonetheless.) I was tickled to death after that long haul to have that type of a welcome committee! The gentlemen unloaded all my tack and equipment for me and led me to my stalls, which had been bedded and prepared for my girls. They helped me get settled in and told me that they had men who would be by twice a day to clean and add shavings if needed, not to worry about a thing. You could have knocked me over with a feather... Talk about gracious hospitality! I felt like I'd finally made the big times. It was quite a moment for me in my early career to be treated with that much kindness and respect by those folks.

I made the entry deadline and was set on high kill. The competition at this contest was going to be fierce! Chunky Woodward was there on the great champion Peppy San, Bill Collins was mounted on Holey Daisy, Dave Batty, Tom Fox and on and on, including several of the top competitors from the U.S., they were all there, the best of the best.

The next day, after resting up from our long journey, I saddled up my two mares and rode them around the grounds for a little light exercise and to get them acquainted with things. I came upon a man feeding the contest cattle, and by the way he was dressed and handling himself, I could tell he was from Texas and a real cowboy. "Long way from home aren't you?" I asked. He said, "who wants to know?". "Leon Harrel from Leedey, Oklahoma" I replied. We struck up a conversation and it turned out he was from Shamrock, Texas only about 80 miles from Leedey. We reminisced about home over a cold beer and a sandwich. That was the day I was fortunate enough to meet Buck Tomerson. Before I left him that day, I asked him if was checking the cattle during the night, and if he was,

would he consider letting me pay him to check on my mares as well. He said he'd be happy to, not to worry about them, they'd be fine.

The day of the finals, when I looked at the draw, it struck me as kind of odd that the five B.C. finalists were in the first bunch of cattle and the five U.S. finalists all drew up in the second bunch, hmmm. I looked up and here came Buck, he said to me, "Something's funny, they had me split those finalist cattle in two herds, but they only settled one herd in the main arena for the finals tonight." We walked to the two pens of cattle and Buck showed me the herd that had been settled. Gazing at the herd, I gave this some mature thought and said, "Buck, I'll give you \$200 if you go in that pen of unsettled cattle and just keep walking through and around them, then put them in another pen and do the same thing until they're gentle as lambs." He asked if he could do it on his horse, and I was fine with that. :)

Come finals night, everyone was very surprised when the second set of cattle was better than the first set. As it turned out *Fizzabar* won the finals and Chunky Woodward won the overall average for the entire contest. (I won the battle that night, and Chunky won the war!)

Til next time...