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2 Brothers Specialize In Raising Rodeo Stock Elko Ranch Specializes In 'Outlaws'

By JEAN McELRATH

Nevada's cagiest "outlaw" today is Cornflakes, a 10-year-old saddle horse. Big, rangey and the color of wet cornflakes, he makes a profession of burnishing the legend that "a Prunty bucking horse is a sonovagun of a buckler."

Cornflakes has marked each of his seven years as a professional buckler by adding new tricks and improved variations of the old to a repertoire that challenges cowboys and delights crowds in three states. The number of cowboys parting company with Cornflakes in a hurry has never been tallied, but it is significant that sticking with him for 10 seconds can almost guarantee the day's top money to the rider accomplishing the feat. Efficient and homely, he is the star of a string of 200 bucking horses that are part of the Diamond A Rodeo Livestock Company, operated by Prunty Brothers, Franklin (Shorty), 36, and Harold (Corky), 27, from their Charleston ranch 83 miles north of Elko.

Wheel-of-Fortune, a 2,025 pound Brahma-Durham bull shares the spotlight with Cornflakes for top honors among the Prunty Brothers' bucking stars. Rare is the man who can fork Wheel-of-Fortune for eight seconds while the great brute simultaneously bucks in stiff, spine-cracking jumps, and whirls in dizzy circles.

Crowds Enthusiastic

The crowds love it, as they do Sad Sam, a Brahma-Angus cross, whose little eyes gleam with vicious delight as he throws his 1900 pounds of fighting bull into efforts to annihilate a limber-legged little rodeo clown. Sad Sam will fight almost anything or anybody in the arena, which, as a crowd-pleaser, makes him worth as much as a top bucking horse, right around \$300.

"Quien sabe?" shrugged a cow-hand when asked if one bronc was a good saddle horse. The Spanish phrase, meaning "who knows" stuck, but the horse who bears it leaves little doubt about his bucking ability in the minds of either rider or spectator today. Though more than half of their horse are raised on their home ranch or the wild Diamond A desert that gives the livestock company its name, Prunty Brothers are always in the market for reliable buckers.

You can't tell a buckler either horse or bull by looking at him, according to Corky Prunty.

Ambitious cowboys, young...and usually single...often visit the off-track Prunty ranch, eager for a chance to practice riding techniques by trying out broncs and bulls for them. It was the brothers' own love of the sport, plus that predilection for bucking characteristic of so many Prunty horses that put them in the rodeo game. Nowadays, the brothers (both married and each the father of two sons) confine their rodeo participation to roping events, "and that is strictly a hobby with us."

Though it is more than 70 years since their grandfather trekked from Virginia, via Texas, into northeastern Nevada to try his luck at mining, time hasn't erased a trace of the south that carries over in Corky Prunty's soft-spoken tones. He explains that their bulls come mostly from Texas and he favors a Brahma-Angus cross, for their fight and because the calves eventually bring more on the beef market. The bull-dogging steers are scrubs, with extra heavy horns, perhaps descendants of Texas longhorns, but imported now from the Mexican desert country. Cowboys who participate have a lot to say about the stock. Bull-dogging steers, for example, have to be replaced yearly. Otherwise the critters get wise and develop such tricks as sitting up, to make things tough for the bull-doggers. Bulldogging (steer wrestling) at best is no sissy sport.

Brahma Calves Popular

Roping experts prefer Brahma calves, too, the brothers find. They're faster, have more stamina and fight, and put on a better show, either for calf or team roping. "You have to please the cowboy, he makes the show," observes Corky, a slim, dark-haired fellow with a glint of humor in his brown eyes. "You have to please the community's rodeo committee. They write out your check. You have to please the crowd. They make the gate. You don't have to be a combination diplomat, public relations expert, movie star, bookkeeper, and livestock man to be in rodeo show business...but it would sure help!" Pruntys first furnished bucking horses for the Fourth of July fete at Jarbidge in 1936. Mountain City's rodeo next applauded Prunty's "sons-o-guns-o-buckers."

"We just sold our horses to the Silver State Stampede in Elko for about eight years. You don't make much on your horses that way," Corky remembers. "We noticed that our horses didn't have any more trouble throwing world champions than they did our local cowboys."

Four year ago, Wells Amateur Rodeo Committee wanted a package deal...horses, bulls, roping stock, clown, master of ceremonies...the works. "We gave them what they wanted, and every year the business grows, until now instead of doing it for a sideline to ranching, things reversed themselves." This season from mid-April to mid-September, the brothers will have staged 14 rodeos, including four in Idaho, three in Oregon, and seven in Nevada. The shows differ in that Idaho and Oregon prefer night shows, with beautiful and impressive parades and grand entries, which show off to advantage the mounted posses and riding clubs, especially popular in the northwest. Nevada towns to date, want daytime shows, and like roping events requiring a tricky art much valued by Nevada cowboys.

Masculine World

The rodeo world is a masculine one, as far as livestock is concerned. "Mares get smart and quit bucking in short order. Also, some of our bucking horses are range stallions and even one mare in the lot gets them all excited...takes their mind off their business."

Transportation is no minor item when Prunty Brothers put their show on the road. Commercial truckers move the stock, an average of 160 head per rodeo, in big tractor-trailer rigs that accommodate 30 to 33 bulls or horses to an outfit. Distemper put a real crimp in operations and swept away High Noon, a top buckler, last year. Brain fever is an ever-present, though seldom encountered threat. Hay, bought at the rodeo site, ranges in price from \$28 (in dry Elko county) to \$15 (Idaho) per ton, and it takes 18 men to handle details, including pick-up men who merit spectator cheers, and behind scenes handlers, who get the animals when they're on the prod.

Animals, like their human counterparts in show business, get to be real troupers, Prunty Brothers find. Because they are well fed and cared for, rodeo animals are not difficult to handle, and often head for the trucks to load when the big transports pull in at the ranch corrals. Cowboy Association rules call for blunt spurs; the savvy bronc rider knows his horse bucks better if not cinched too tightly; though broncs are not shod, they will not buck well if their feet hurt.

A bucking horse averages one minutes working time, including time he's in the chute, per rodeo. This means, he sees a lot of country, gets preferred treatment when it comes to food, medical care and handling...and works less than a half an hour a year. Cornflakes, obviously, is the cagiest "outlaw" in Nevada today.