

Stonyford's Superb Seventy-Fifth Show

by Roy Stewart

Superb in every way describes the 75th Annual Stonyford Rodeo held on May 5 and 6, 2018. The weather on both days was balmy and slightly overcast. The crowd--estimated at over 2,050 fans on Saturday and 1,400 on Sunday--filled the stadium with their cheering and clapping. The amateur and professional contestants delivered exciting action with their riding and animal-handling skills. The bucking stock made the cowboys work hard for their small victories. The entertainers--announcer Don Jesser, clown/barrelman J. J. Harrison and specialty act, John Payne--delighted the crowd with their professionalism--especially, the one-arm Payne with his superb riding and whip-handling skills. And, the rodeo professionals--bullfighters, pickup men, Queen girls, and gate-handling cowboys--demonstrated their remarkable skills in protecting the cowboys, clearing stock from the arena, and otherwise keeping the rodeo running efficiently.

The rodeo began on both days with the Flying Cossacks entering and circling the arena. They were a locally grown team of eight trick-riding children, seven of whom are members of the extended Moore family. An earlier generation of Moore family members was instrumental in starting this rodeo 75 years ago, in 1943. Carmel Moore Ellerman, her four daughters, and niece represented the Flying Cossacks. Carmel was the team's teacher, coach, mother, and aunt. Daughters Mette Ellerman Jones, Tami Ellerman Thompson, Fawn Ellerman Mendoza, and Jozell Ellerman, along with their niece, Karen (Gay) Moore were performers. The other three performers not present were Carmel's son Troy Ellerman, her niece Debbi Moore Ingram, and their friend from Paskenta, Casey Weston. As a team, the Flying Cossacks last appeared in Stonyford in 1987--they finished their trick-riding careers at the 1991 NFR (National Rodeo Finals) in Las Vegas.

Also on both days, Stonyford honored local area veterans with a horizontal unrolling of a large Stars-and-Stripes flag being held by members of the Maxwell American Legion Post. On Saturday, Senator Jim Nielsen presented the Stony Creek Horsemen's Association with a framed California legislative resolution honoring the organization for its 75 years of rodeo.

Following these ceremonies, the rodeo began with novice bull riding that was followed by bareback riding, team roping, junior steer riding, steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, tie-down roping, WPRA barrel racing, and bull riding. Intermixed with all this rodeo action were the dedication to Barry and Sandy Corbin, the crowd-pleasing Mutton Bustin' and the exciting specialty act: John Payne, the One-Arm Bandit. His act showcased his one-arm riding and bullwhipping skills while herding two shaggy American buffalo onto the top of a long stock-hauling trailer.

Eight cowboys competed in the Novice Bull Riding, three on Saturday and five on Sunday. They rode hard but none was able to remain on their bulls for the eight seconds needed to qualify. Seven men wrestled steers on Saturday and another seven on Sunday. The most memorable contest was Saturday's Johnny B. Fruht, of Santa Rosa, who rolled over with the steer three times before emerging upright and wrestling it to the ground. Unfortunately, he broke the barrier, which added ten seconds to his remarkable 14.4-second time. Three cowboys on Saturday and three on Sunday successfully subdued their steers. Sunday's Blaine Jones won \$1,465 with his 5.5-second time. Three others finished in the money: Dillon Hushour, 2nd place; Dane Browning, 3rd place; and Ryle Smith, 4th place.

Four riders on Saturday and five on Sunday competed in Junior Steer Riding. The steers got the better of both days' events, with only one contestant qualifying on each day. Braedyn Schwenger won the event with an 89-point ride, and Hughes Hunter came in second at 72-points.

Bareback riding, always exciting, was especially so this year. Four men rode each day, and seven of the eight qualified with good scores, the lowest being 64 points. The eighth man, Sunday's Cauy Pool, delivered the most unusual performance. On the third buck after leaving the chute, his horse, Black Berry Juice, went to ground, then rolled upright with Cauy still aboard. Cauy stayed with this bucking fool through the 8-second buzzer and bucked on for another second or two before a pickup man lifted him off. It was a hell of a ride, but no score. He got a re-ride later in the rodeo, but finished out of the money. Sunday's Grant Denny won \$940 with his 82-point ride. Wyatt Denny, at 79.5 points; Casey Meroshnekoff, at 79 points, and Brent Bannon, at 75 points, finished in the money.

Nineteen roping teams competed for money in the Team Roping events. Each team has two ropers, one for the animal's head (header) and one for its rear legs (heeler). Most failed in their roping; however, seven made the grade: five on Saturday and two on Sunday. Saturday's Doyle Hoskins (heeler) and Joseph Shawnego (header) won \$1,465 each with their 5.2-second time. Five other teams finished in the money.

Seventeen cowboys enrolled in Saddle Bronc Riding: seven on Saturday and ten on Sunday. Fewer than half had qualifying rides: four on Saturday and four on Sunday. In retrospect, after viewing the video, Saturday's Rowdy Stone had the most poignant ride: he made the buzzer but committed a disqualifying technical violation. The photo reveals his agony, as he squatted in the arena for a second or two, after gracefully leaving his horse. Johnny Espeland took home the 1st place money of \$1,147 with his 81-point ride. Three others finished with money.



Rowdy Stone agonizes over his disqualification in Sunday's Saddle Bronc Riding competition. He had stayed on his bucking horse for the required eight seconds. Photo by Roy Stewart.

Seventeen cowboys also competed in Tie-Down Roping. Thirteen got their calves successfully lassoed and immobilized. Jordan Ketscher, last year's All-Around Cowboy, won \$913 with his 9.3-second time. Five others finished with money.

Up to this point, it was a male-only rodeo; but women also competed near the end. Their event was WPRA (Women's Professional Rodeo Association) Barrel Racing. Ten women competed on Saturday and nine on Sunday. Stonyford's own Vicky Cook took 1st place and \$910, with her 17.26-second ride. Seven other women scored cash prizes ranging from \$791 for 2nd place to \$79 for 8th place.

Finally, it was time for Bull Riding—professional rodeo's most exciting event. Stonyford divided this event into two sections in which ten riders competed on Saturday and another ten on Sunday. This year the bulls won two fewer contests than in three of the last four years. Four cowboys stayed up for eight seconds this year, as compared with only two in 2014, 2015, and 2017. Twenty-sixteen was a banner year for the cowboys: five of them hung on for the full eight seconds. This year Lon Danley's 83.5-second ride took the 1st place prize money of \$1,247. The other three qualifiers, Ryan McConnel (83), Chase Dougherty (81.5) and Colton Dougherty (71) took home decreasing amounts of \$970, \$727, and \$520, respectively.

If this was not enough for Stonyford's diehard fans, "slack" events followed each day's rodeo. Saturday had seven barrel-race and nine team-roping competitions. Sunday had eight barrel-race and twenty-five team-roping contests.

This year's All-Around Cowboy was Doyle Hoskins, who won \$1,623 in tie-down roping and team roping.