



Dan Fisher extended his record this year as the oldest man to qualify for the Clem McSpadden National Finals Steer Roping while his horse, Larneds Ricoche Doc, tied for horse of the year.



Full-Time Horsemen

FROM MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, THE Fishers of Andrews, Texas, are oilmen and ranchers. On Saturdays and Sundays, they're rodeo cowboys.

But every day of the week, they're horsemen, working as a family to condition horses, tune them up and teach them the arcane art of steer roping.

"My dad (Marvin Fisher) was a real fanatic on horses always working good," says Dan Fisher, 62. "When you got home from a roping, he didn't want to know how you placed, he wanted to know whether the horses worked good."

That dedication to perfection has stretched from Marvin – a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association contestant himself – through Dan into his sons, J. Tom and Vin Jr.

This year, Dan qualified for the Clem McSpadden National Finals Steer Roping for the 16th time while beating his own record of being the oldest man to qualify for a National Finals event at 62 years and 4 months. In addition to former champions Rocky Patterson, Scott Snedecor and Trevor Brazile, Dan was scheduled to face his own sons – both about half his age – for the championship November 8-9 in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

It's the second time all three Fishers have qualified for the finals, and it's a feat no other father-son teams have matched, says PRCA spokesman Jim Bainbridge.

"I still work at steer roping and stay in shape," Dan says. "Since I have sons who are interested and want to work at

The rodeoing Fisher family knows good horses and hard work are the best way to make it to the national finals.

By Larri Jo Starkey

it every day, I have the opportunity to stay competitive. I work out three days a week and put a lot of effort into being able to do what I do.”

Dan had an edge going into the finals. He was riding Larneds Ricoche Doc, a 1995 gelding who tied this year for AQHA-PRCA steer roping horse of the year. It was “Woody’s” third win. He also tied for the title in 2008 and won it outright in 2009.

“I have such a great horse that it makes it easier to stay competitive than it would be for someone who doesn’t have a great horse,” Dan says. “I’m not going to quit until Woody quits. When you work every day, you can be competitive.”

Woody is just one of the horses the Fishers have made the old-fashioned way – one hard-working day at a time.

Getting Started

DAN WAS A TEAM ROPER TO BEGIN WITH, QUALIFYING FOR THE National Finals Rodeo in 1981 and 1982 in heeling. Then he found steer roping.

“A good friend of mine, Jimmy Longino, always wanted me to try steer roping, and he told me he’d give me his horse if I’d do it,” Dan says. “I traveled a lot with Charlie Price and Guy Allen, team roping, and they both steer roped, so they got me interested in it. Once I tried it, I quit team roping pretty quick. I thought there wasn’t anything better than team roping until I tried steer roping.”

As Dan started figuring out the techniques for his new favorite sport, he figured out one more important thing: Steer roping has a user-friendly schedule.

“It’s something a family man should think about if he wants to rodeo,” says Dan, who has been a family man since his marriage to Pam in 1976. “You’re not gone all winter, just summer and fall and a little bit in the spring.”



Dan’s father, Marvin, always wanted to know how the horse worked more so than if the horse won.



Steer roping horses start from one side of the steer and cross behind him to rate. Here, Vin has moved across on Jeep Elite, a 2000 palomino gelding by Freckles Elite and out of Mechi Jeepers by Te N Teen. “Jeep” has been in the running for horse of the year before.

Pam and Dan had expanded their family with arrival of Vin, J. Tom and their daughter, McKinley, and life was pretty busy in Andrews. Pam was working as an art teacher in Andrews before getting her doctorate and moving to administration. In addition to raising Hereford cattle on the ranch, Dan was also importing and quarantining cattle from Mexico.

In the meantime, he kept honing his craft. His first National Finals Steer Roping qualification was in 1986, and in 1996, he was reserve world champion.

In the summers, when school was out, Dan and Pam loaded up their truck and trailer with three kiddoes and a good horse, and set off across the United States to find places to rope.

Mostly, those were the biggest rodeos in the world – Cheyenne, Pendleton and Deadwood.

“It was a terrific way to grow up,” says Vin, who entered his first rodeo at age 11.

Though all the younger Fishers rodeoed, Dan wouldn’t let any of them rope steers until he thought they were ready. For

Vin, that was when he was 17. The day before a rodeo at Monahans, Texas, at the Triple V Arena run by Vance Vest – Vin remembers every tiny detail about the day – he was practicing at home with Dan.

“I’ll never forget my dad telling me to ‘Go ahead and tie this next steer down,’ ” Vin says. “That was probably the most nervous and most excited I have ever been to back in the box. I didn’t win the roping that weekend, but I did tie the fastest steer of the day, and I was hooked.”

Besides being cautious with their rodeo careers, Dan and Pam also insisted that all their children go to college, with all three of them picking nearby Texas Tech University in Lubbock instead of Dan’s own alma maters of the University of Texas or Sul Ross State University.

McKinley, now McKinley Morgan, is an attorney in Andrews, while J. Tom and Vin both work in the petroleum industry that powers the West Texas community’s economy.

And when the Fishers aren’t working at their jobs, they’re working on their horses.

PRO RODEO’S STARS



Each year since 1989, AQHA and the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association have honored the top horses in steer wrestling, tie-down roping, team roping, steer roping and barrel racing. The top 25 PRCA and Women’s Professional Rodeo Association timed-event competitors in each category select the winners. Here are this year’s winners. Make sure your AQHA membership is current so you can read about these horses in this month’s *America’s Horse*, which is available in print and digitally.

Tie-Down Roping

Big Smokin Wonder, aka “Pearl,” a 1997 sorrel mare (Big As I Am-Lucky

Smokin Jade by Lucky Captain Jess) bred by J and DQuarter Horse Farm of Hico, Texas; owned by Sid Miller of Stephenville, Texas; ridden by Cody Ohl, Shane Hanchy, Randy Carlisle, Scott Kormos, Blair Burk, Chase Williams and Trevor Brazile

Steer Wrestling

Speedy Faila, aka “Two Guns,” a 2001 gray gelding (Winning Speed-Easy Faila by Easy Request) bred by Bill and Don Jensen of Poteet, Texas; owned by Wade Sumpter and Dr. Chris Morrow, Amarillo; ridden by Wade Sumpter, Billy Bugenig and Seth Brockman

Team Roping - Heading

Lucys Fast Jewel, aka “Jewel,” a 2004 bay mare (Dox King Gilligan-Lucys Lil Hickory by Brinks Leo Hickory) bred by John McFarlane of Wilder, Idaho; owned and ridden by Brandon Beers of Powell Butte, Oregon

Team Roping - Heeling

CD Starbucks, aka “Starbucks,” a 1998 sorrel gelding (CD Olena-Cari Me Starlight by Grays Starlight) bred by Danny Connelly Motes of Weatherford, Texas; owned and ridden by Ryan Motes of Weatherford, Texas

Steer Roping - Tie

Olee Roberto, aka “Major,” a 2001 sorrel gelding (Les Olee Glo-Roberto Liz by Roberto Dan) bred by Hilmar G. Moore of Richmond, Texas; owned by Thomas C. Snedecor of Needville, Texas; ridden by Scott Snedecor

Larneds Ricoche Doc, aka “Woody,” a 1995 bay gelding (Vals Boy-Easy Caliente Larned by Strictly Easy) bred by Gerre Larned of Haskell, Texas; owned and ridden by Dan Fisher of Andrews, Texas

Barrel Racing

Flos Heiress, aka “Babyflo,” a 2006 sorrel mare (Dr Nick Bar-Flowers And Money by On The Money Red) bred and ridden by Fallon Taylor of Whitesboro, Texas; owned by Dian Taylor of Ponder, Texas



The Fishers don't put every prize they have won on display, but every single trophy a horse has won is in clear view when you walk in their houses.

Training Steer Roping Horses

IN A DUSTY, WIND-BLOWN ARENA ON THE FISHER RANCH OUTSIDE OF Andrews, Dan and Vin practice. J. Tom is out of town on business, but a family friend is there to rope with the Fishers during the *Journal's* visit on a Sunday afternoon after church.

They could all be inside on their couch, napping and maybe catching a game on TV. Instead, they're all saddled up for practice, like they are most days.

In steer roping, a single cowboy ropes a steer around the horns and then trips the steer. The steer falls behind the horse and the cowboy dismounts and ties the steer's legs as the horse pulls the steer toward the rider. The horse has to work unassisted, and all the action is behind him. For a prey animal that relies on sight, having that much activity behind him can be frightening.

"We work more on the horses than we work on ourselves," Dan says. "Everywhere we go, we're always looking for a horse to be better than the horse we have."

A horse that can handle the pressure of the bright lights, the screaming rodeo crowds, the fast start, the quick stop and the need to stand quietly at the end of that ruckus,

well, that horse is worth sizable jingle.

Making their own horses puts that money back in Fisher pockets.

"I look for a real good mind to start with," Dan says. "A horse that acts cool and isn't stupid. Horses without good minds might have tons of ability – maybe the best horse you ever rode – but they don't have that winning edge.

"We need a horse that has a sweet mind, that wants to let you win, that isn't trying to cheat you. We call (those kinds of horses) winners."

Woody has been an AQHA-PRCA horse of the year three times, and in 2003, Vin had the AQHA-PRCA steer roping horse of the year, Fannin War Leo.

When they go horse-shopping – and everywhere they go, they're horse-shopping – the Fishers are looking for a seasoned horse, preferably a heading horse that won't be thrown by the excitement of a crowd.

"I look for a horse that's strong, that scores good," Dan says. "He should have a nice eye and straight legs. They need to be real sound. I like a horse with a lot of muscle that works on his butt, not his front end."

For horses that have been heading horses, the first thing to learn is to rate from the opposite side.

"We lead a lot of steers off, teaching the horses to go the right direction," Dan says. "We log every day, sometimes twice a day. We rope in the afternoon and log after we get through."

The Fishers also use driving lines, to teach the horses the word "Whoa" when they hear it behind them. Usually, it takes six months to a year to train one.

"I had one horse that I had 14 days, and I hauled him to Sheridan, Wyoming, and went to winning on him," Dan says. "He was just that smart and picked it up quickly. He wasn't perfect in 14 days, but he was ready to go. He was a real cool horse that just wanted to do right."

Cool-minded horses also make good baby-sitter horses, and it's not uncommon to see one or more of Vin's young children riding steer roping horses while their dad, uncle and granddad practice on others, meaning there's a good chance a fourth generation of Fishers will take up the sport.

2013 Clem McSpadden National Finals Steer Roping

THIS YEAR, DAN WAS NINTH IN THE PRCA STEER-ROPING standings going into the steer roping finals. Vin was sitting in fifth, with J. Tom in sixth.

Rodeo cowboys like to say that horses make their money in the second 10 years of life. Woody is 18. Dan is 62. That's 80 years of passion and experience in steer roping. They're in striking distance of the top, not to mention the chance to win the finals average.

At press time, the *Journal* didn't know how all three Fishers ended the year.

Here's what we do know and can say with absolute certainty: The day after the national finals, the three Fisher horsemen were riding again, practicing, working on their horses and themselves.

"If you want to do something bad enough, you find a way to make it happen," Vin says.

That's what winners do. 🐾

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