

# Whoop-Up Days

Peter Scott, City Editor 328-4411

## This year's rodeo a Minor attraction

### Whoop-Up royalty rides with the best

Some life for a queen! She's had to abandon school for a year and work every weekend since April. Her palace is in the next town down the highway, a stretch of asphalt which can run from Jasper, Alberta to Las Vegas, Nevada. And while her crown contains real rubies, she has to give it back.

But this year's sweetheart of the rodeo, Dode Minor, has proven to be solid gold royalty for her sport.

"It's been a lot of fun," said Minor, fulfilling official duties as Miss Rodeo Canada during Whoop-Up Days. "I grew up around rodeo."

"At first the travel was a little trying... but now I'm used to it."

At least she doesn't have to spend lonely hours in motels and eat alone in restaurants. Minor stays with a host family in each town she visits.

In Lethbridge she stays with Wally and Alice Kostelansky and their daughter Trish, a former Miss Rodeo Canada. Trish is also Minor's companion and helps with her scheduling.

Minor, 22, from Bindloss, attended Medicine Hat High School. She spent two years at Red Deer Community College before moving to the faculty of education University of Lethbridge where she's majoring in English and drama.

She began entering queen contests in 1987 when she was a princess at the Jenner Rodeo. In 1991 she was the rodeo queen at the Medicine Hat Stampede and won the Miss Rodeo Canada title in Edmonton at the Canadian Rodeo Finals last November.

This November, she'll crown a new Miss Rodeo Canada, but Minor will still represent the country at the National Finals Rodeo in Vegas in December.

During Whoop-Up Days, Minor appears at many mall and downtown events, was in the Whoop-Up parade and rides in the rodeo grand entry. But this queen can get down and dirty, too. She chases steers and calves from the arena during the show.

"Trish has organized Lethbridge for me," said Minor. "I've served pancakes and banana splits, been involved in downtown activities and in the malls."

There's also a Miss Rodeo Canada princess, Tanya Vair of Medicine Hat, but the Calgary Stampede is the only time the two girls appear together.

Through the winter, Minor's schedule was quiet, her biggest event a trip to Denver, Colorado in January. But the summer schedule is hectic.

There are school visits and dozens of questions to answer.

To qualify to become Miss Rodeo Canada, a contestant must be between 18 and 25 and single.

A major part of the judging centres on horsemanship.

"We don't get to use our own horse, and that way it shows we can ride anything," Minor said. "We also have to do prepared and impromptu speeches and pass a test checking out our knowledge of rodeo."

There are modelling assignments and physical appearance does play a role.

While it may be a rough schedule, it has its rewards.

From Whoop-Up Days, Minor heads to Red Deer for the Cutting Horse Association Finals and then on to a rodeo in Jasper and a bullarama in Saskatoon.

She's always on the go and always before the public.

"I try to remember I'm in the public eye and to act accordingly," said Minor. "When you are representing an entire sport, you have to take things quite seriously."



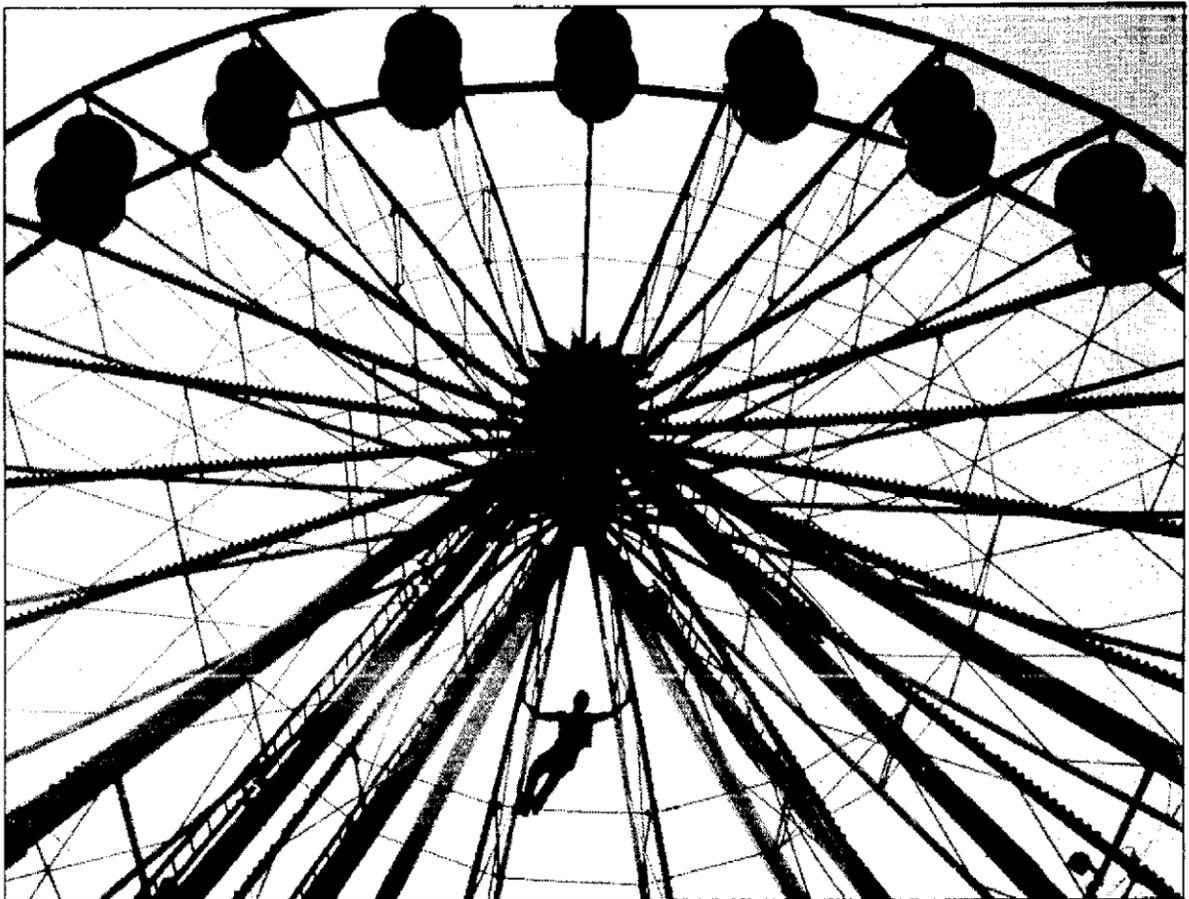
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FERRIS WHEEL SPOKESMAN DON RAUSCHER CLIMBS THE GIANT: \$250 A WEEK AND AN 8x8 ROOM

## Big wheel keeps on turnin'

### It takes a Squirt to keep a Giant happy

By GARRY ALLISON  
of The Herald

There's a big wheel in town. At 36 metres in diameter, it's large enough to be called Giant.

And when this squeaky wheel needs grease, it takes a Squirt to do the job.

The Giant is, of course, the ferris wheel at Whoop-Up Days, part of the Mighty Thomas Carnival's array of midway thrills. The Squirt is Don Rauscher, the man responsible for keeping the wheel turning out memories for those game enough to board her buckets.

Rauscher, 30 born in Austin, Texas and living in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, wouldn't have it any other way.

As first man on the Giant Wheel on the Whoop-Up Days midway — the towering 21-bucket ferris wheel is capable of carrying four adults or six kids in each bucket — Rauscher is perfectly content.

The five-foot-five Rauscher — thus the nickname — said he should be called Tarzan or Monkey because of the way he scrambles through the superstructure of the brightly lit Giant Wheel with its thousands of lights. He has no fear of heights.

The Giant Wheel needs four permanent staff to erect, operate, tear down and transport it. They're supported by three other helpers who assist the public on and off the ride.

The Giant Wheel is moved on two huge semi-trailer units. It cost the Mighty Thomas Carnival about \$1 million, including the trucks.

It takes 26 hours, in two to three shifts, to put up the Giant Wheel and, with an expert, experienced crew, nine to 10 hours to tear down. An inexperienced crew takes up to 15 hours.

The Giant Wheel arrived at Lethbridge Whoop-Up Days early this year because Medicine Hat, where the Thomas carnival played before hitting Whoop-Up Days, doesn't have a midway large enough to accommodate the superstructure said Rauscher.

The Giant Wheel, a five-ticket (\$3) ride, shuts down only for lightning and winds higher than 100 km-h.

Rauscher is a high school graduate and a certified welder. He has worked for Thomas off and on for nine years.

This year he signed on Jan. 7 and will leave when the carnival completes its run through the United States and Canada the first week of December. He earns \$250 a week as the first man on the Giant Wheel and is in line for a year-end bonus of \$35 per week, depending on how



LOVE TAP: A LITTLE MID-WEEK MAINTENANCE FOR THE GIRL the season goes.

Single, Rauscher has a girlfriend with the carnival, a ticket-seller named Linda — though the name on one of the four self-administered tattoos on his arms and chest bears another's monicker.

He finds carnival life an enjoyable challenge, travelling from one town to another year round and living in an 8-foot-square cubicle with

bed, shower, sink and shelves, in the special Thomas living trailers. He also sleeps in the cab of his

semi.  
"I do this because I like to see kids and adults smile and laugh, having a good time," he said. "A lifestyle is what you make it... you always have your good days and your bad. I'll always have a job whenever I want one with this carnival. I leave, but I always come back."

"There's a natural high working in a carnival, you feel good about yourself and what you bring to people."

Food is no problem. The midway is full of booths. But like anyone in any job, Rauscher buys groceries. He has a small fridge, a Coleman stove and a portable barbecue for homemade meals.

In the off season he hauls freight, driving his own truck. He also enjoys hunting and fishing, and as his tattoos show, is an accomplished artist. He does a lot of drawings and some headwork, making belts, necklaces and ear rings.

Rauscher is proud of the Mighty Thomas Carnival. He said there have been no accidents on the midway and calls Thomas the safest carnival he's ever seen.

"It's well maintained," said Rauscher. "If something is wrong it's automatically fixed right now. Ride inspectors regularly check things out, some from the carnival and some with the insurance people."

A ride on the Giant Wheel — it goes around three times a minute — will last about two minutes.

Sunday night the Giant Wheel will start to come down and Rauscher and the rest of the carnival will be leaving Canada for the season, heading back to the U.S.

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