

RODEO

Barrel racer named to Rodeo Hall

By GARRY ALLISON
Lethbridge Herald

CARSLAND — She was truly the queen of the cowgirls in Canadian barrel racing circles.

From 1964 into the 1980s the girl to beat at every rodeo in Canada was Garryman's Jerri Duce.

Rodeo's hierarchy has finally recognized that fact and Jerri Duce-Phillips was selected as the first woman to be named to the Canadian Rodeo Hall of Fame at the recent Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton.

The perky, pretty blonde, who won her first of nine Canadian professional barrel racing championships at age 11, is a true Canadian rodeo legend, not only in barrel racing circles but in the world of trick riding as well.

The Flying Duces, Jerri and sister Joy, ran at the top in Canadian barrel racing for years, dominating the sport the way their father Frank and their uncle Bob dominated bareback bronc riding in their era.

Now Jerri, aged 45 and mother of Falon, an upcoming 14-year-old barrel racer, is going into the Canadian Rodeo Hall of Fame in the brand new complex at Cochrane on the Cochrane Ranch historical site.

"It's quite an honor," says Duce-Phillips, from her Carsland-area ranch overlooking the Bow River. "It is very special and it's nice too because Dad and Uncle Bob are in there as well. (Her father was a two-time Canadian bareback champion).

"It is nice to go down in history, to know I'll always be there, in the Hall and in the record books. They've al-

ready put me to work, wanting me to work on the barrel racing display."

Her first championship came in 1964 and started an unprecedented parade of titles in Canadian pro rodeo circles with crowns also in 1965, 66, 68, 70, 74, 75, 76 and 77.

Her last race was run in 1993, but now she's planning on coming back.

"I'll be running barrels with Falon," she says with a laugh. "As long as I'm packing her around I might as well be competing. Actually, I really am thinking of racing again. I just purchased a new colt and I'll be training it with the idea of racing."

Don't rule out title No. 10 if she does return, because Duce-Phillips has never done anything halfway.

It's not that she's planning to return to barrel racing because she's not busy.

With husband Lee Phillips, himself a domineering force in professional rodeo and a past Canadian steer wrestling champion, the Duce-Phillips duo has been busy working in the movie and television commercial industry, and she's returned to trick riding and teaching it as well.

In fact, a program featuring trick riding on John Scott's World of Horses on the Discovery Channel spotlighted Jerri and her riding.

It is somehow ironic she is now teaching trick riding, underlining the finer points of the sport, when she and sister Joy learned the dangerous and spectacular sport from a book. They'd read and study the diagrams of the tricks, and then go out in the pasture

and try them. She was nine at the time, Joy was seven.

The girls had seen a trick riding saddle and talked their dad into buying it. They were practising on their own when they saw an ad in Western Horseman magazine for a book, How to Trick Ride. They bought it.

Joy is married to a respected and knowledgeable U.S. horseman, Glen Barlow, and lives in Gillette, Wyo.

The Flying Duces have been featured around the world. Jerri's travel log is astounding, and includes countries like England, Scotland, Bermuda, Japan, Australia and all throughout Canada and the United States. She's performed at Expo '67, dozens of times at the Calgary Stampede, the Toronto Winter Fair.

San Francisco Cow Palace, Fort Worth, Madison Square Garden in New York, and she and Joy performed during the opening ceremonies for the Olympic Games in Calgary.

"The Olympic experience was awesome," says Jerri. "I guess I've toured the world, I've been pretty lucky."

Married 18 years ago, Jerri and Lee slowly worked their way out of rodeo competition on a steady basis.

From 1988 to 1992 they virtually quit altogether, devoting their time, hearts and energy to a group foster home for native children. But the past few years Jerri has made her way back into the rodeo arena through her trick riding, with performances at Ponoka and Strathmore and the High School Rodeo Finals, as well as the TV show for the World of Horses.

"The last two years I've been hauling Falon to amateur and all-girls rodeos, so things haven't been dull," she says. "My trick riding horse is 20 or 21 years old, but still runs like a four-year-old."

Duce-Phillips goes Hollywood

CARSLAND — Back in 1975, when she was the toast of the Canadian Rodeo Finals in barrel racing, Jerri Duce had her first exposure to Hollywood.

Along with sister Joy and other rodeo stars like Tom Bews and Fred Larson, she played a major role in the making of the movie Buffalo Bill and the Indians, starring Paul Newman and Burt Lancaster.

Then in the mid-1990s the bug bit again.

She left a lasting impression on the set too, running over a member of the crew with her horse.

"I was riding backwards on my horse's neck, doing a trick," Duce said about the incident in 1975. "The crowd all around us was confusing the horse and he headed for an opening — right over a guy named Atec, knocking him cold."

But Hollywood apparently has forgotten or forgiven. Today, Jerri Duce-Phillips and husband Lee, a former Canadian champion bulldogger, are being kept busy with work in the movie industry, much of it behind the scenes as a wrangler, driver and in Jerri's case a stunt woman.

Jerri laughs and says the movie industry is naturally attracted to rodeo cowboys whenever horses are involved in a picture because they realize rodeo people know how to fall off and get back on and do it again.

The brand new inductee into the Canadian Rodeo Hall of Fame has been in about a dozen movies, commercials and TV shows now, including the 1994 film Scarlet Letter with Demi Moore.

"That was something, we filmed on Vancouver Island and in Nova Scotia," says Jerri. "Lee had to drive the horses clear across Canada."

She was also part of How the West Was Fun, Legends of the Fall and has just finished work on a new Disney movie, Eaters of the Dead.

"Mostly Lee is a wrangler (caring for the horses and taking them through their on-screen activities) and I do stunts," says Jerri. "It's part of being from rodeo, they want you to fall off. We are making a very good living in the movies right now."

"I have to pick and choose what and where we work, with Falon still in school. The commercials have been mostly since 1994."

Duce-Phillips didn't do too much falling off while active in rodeo, she was too busy winning trophies and championships.

Between herself and Lee there must be enough trophy buckles in the ranch home for all the belts in Canada, and Jerri alone has 16 trophy saddles, from Southern and Central Circuit awards to Canadian championships. There's also a Tierra in there as well, from when she was crowned the first Miss Rodeo Canada at the first Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton 24 years ago.

Jerri Duce Phillips has always made people sit up and take notice at the Finals. She holds the record for the most points ever earned at the Finals over six performances.

In 1976 and 1977 she picked up 230 of a possible 240 points over six runs. She also has the most first-place finishes in 1975, 1976 and 1977 at the Finals, placing first five of six runs in each of those years.

She was also the first Canadian barrel racer to ever qualify for the National Finals Rodeo, the world champion ships then held in Oklahoma City. She qualified for the NFR in 1975, 1976 and 1977, but was unable to pass the 120 to show and to qualify.

In 1975 she was sitting fourth in the world and was on her way to her best year ever when her prized horse tragically died in a fire.

That fire marked the end of one of the most spectacular and dominating streaks of championships and performances ever seen in Canadian barrel racing circles.



THE QUEEN: Jerri Duce-Phillips dominated barrel racing into the 1980s.

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