

Historic Cutting Horse Article



Written by Cited Author

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From the 1953 archives of TIME magazine

Tucson bustled with ten-gallon hats and horse talk. Cattlemen and horse breeders from all over the wide West were winding up the 1953 convention of the American Quarter Horse Association, and they found plenty of horseflesh to admire. A three-year-old named Rukin String drew his share of the talk by running the quarter-mile in 22.1 seconds—just a tenth over the world record. But the climax of Tucson's week was the cutting-horse contest, which had brought to town 34 of the best-trained ranch horses in the world.

A cutting horse needs high spirits and a high I.Q. His highly specialized ranch job is to nose into a herd and cut away calves marked for market. Rancher Gay Copeland, president of the N.C.H.A. last year, sums up the requirements: "He has to be light on his feet, like a dancer. He has to be easy to turn, and a quick thinker. He has to know which way a calf intends to move, then outsmart him."

Battle of Wits. By the final go 'round last week, it was apparent to the crowd that a four-year-old bay mare named Marion's Girl, a virtual unknown in cutting-horse circles, was the horse to beat. Owned by Rancher Marion Flynt of Midland, Texas, who bought her 18 months ago for \$2,000, Marion's Girl took an early lead in points and was never headed.

In the final, nuzzling gently into a herd of 40 calves under the slack-reined guidance of her regular rider and trainer, Buster Welch, Marion's Girl singled out the liveliest calf of the show. Within 20 seconds she had nudged the calf clear of the herd. In ranch work, this would be all that Marion's Girl would have to do; the calf would be roped and led away. In exhibition work, a pair of "turnback" riders, yelling and waving hats, try to drive the calf back into the herd again. This time, charging back from the whooping, the calf found Marion's Girl squarely in his path. Then began a battle of wits and reflexes.

Master's Degree. Prancing nimbly, but standing her ground with no urging from Rider Welch, the horse halted the calf in his rush. For the next minute the two played a dart-and-dodge game, the calf trying to get around the horse and back to the herd. Then the calf gave up—Marion's Girl gravely facing him, head on. Nose to nose they stood, frustrated calf and triumphant horse, while the crowd shouted its appreciation. Said one fervent rancher: "A cow pony with a master's degree."

Rancher Flynt (Square Top 3), who dabbles in oil, baseball (as president of the Midland Indians of the Texas Longhorn League) and rodeos (as president of the Midland Rodeo), is mighty proud of his horse with cow sense. He brags that he wouldn't sell her for all the oil in Texas.