

**\*\*For Immediate Release\*\***

# **A “Real” Rodeo**

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by Laura Dahl

Goodwell, Okla. — When the Cervi Championship Rodeo Company truck unloaded 62 head of 4-year old bucking horses at the Doc Gardner Memorial Arena, neither horse nor cowboy knew what was in store. On Monday, November 13, the Oklahoma Panhandle State University rodeo team sponsored a bareback/saddle bronc riding jackpot that introduced Cervi stock that had never been ridden.

The Cervi company, a family owned and operated business, supplies bucking horses to premier Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) events including the Houston, San Antonio, and Albuquerque rodeos as well as some circuit finals and also has horses chosen every year to challenge the world’s best at the National Finals in Las Vegas. The horses brought in for the jackpot were bred from bucking stock owned by the Cervis, and even though they had been dummy-bucked three times, none of the young stock had ever known a rider. According to Binion Cervi, the operation’s genetic specialist, event producer, and all-around hand, it can be difficult to find cowboys to mount the unproven horses. Because these horses had never been tried, the knowledge that riders exchange about a horse’s performance did not exist and it sets up a risky and possibly dangerous situation. Some of the stock is bound for the Denver rodeo, but the Cervi clan needed to see how the horses work in the arena with a rider in order to choose the best stock out of this particular bunch.

The solution? Fifteen willing area collegiate rodeo cowboys graciously agreed to test the horses for a chance to win cash plus bragging rights. It’s entirely possible that several of the horses featured that day will wind up being top stock in the Cervi bucking string and not many cowboys can claim to be the original rider (or the first one bucked off) of a celebrity horse. This was rodeo in the true sense of the word. When the cowboy gave the signal for chute gate to open, he had no idea what the horse would do and had to remain focused on his mark out and riding in the style that would earn him points while trying to keep his seat. It proved no easy task as several of the inexperienced horses either immediately lost their footing in the soft arena dirt, reared up, or jumped off all four legs rather than stretching out in classic bucking style. Some of the cowboys left the arena richer with OPSU’s Brian Leddy winning the bareback competition and Colin Stalley, a former OPSU rodeo team member, took first in the saddle bronc.

It’s not a rodeo without plenty of help, and Binion’s brother Chase and J. D. Feller served as pick-up men and cousin Scotty was the flanker, plus Paul Peterson, and brothers Robert and Danny Etbauer brought years of experience to the arena and helped show the horses the exit gate. The Cervi family’s high school ag teacher, Tad McMillan, drives the truck to haul the stock.

Through all of the thrills and spills, the members of the stock contracting company took notes of each horse’s movement out of the chute, bucking style, and myriad other details that make a horse worthy of a spot on the team. Binion was excited about measuring each horse’s performance and said, “Breeding bucking horses is a lot like the racehorse breeding industry. It takes just the right mare and stallion to make a bucking superstar in rodeo. There is a lot of risk involved financially, because it can take up to five years to raise that colt up to where he is big enough to buck.” The Cervi company takes extremely good care of their bucking stock, never allowing a rider on any horse until it’s at least four years old because it is better for the health of the horse. Coming from Medicine Bow, Wyo., all of the horses sported thick smooth coats and were fat and sassy coming off their grain-supplemented pasture feed.

Following an initial trial period, six-year old horses are bucked at three or four shows per year, and at seven they go into the main bucking herd of horses. Cervi Rodeo bucks their horses about fifteen times a year, which

means the average bucking horse will work about two minutes a year. When they are at home, they roam thousands of acres of rangeland, and on the road, they are hauled by truck and trailer and never ride in a trailer for longer than eight hours at a time.

Latham said he hopes to make this an annual event and added, "It's a great opportunity for college kids to buck professional stock and it also helps out the Cervi family in determining not only which horses are potential stars, but also in getting a first look at the traits passed to the offspring from the brood mares and stallions." It's difficult to tell who learned more from the experience, the horses or the cowboys, but one thing is certain: Cervi horses are born to buck and cowboys enjoy the challenge.

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