

Local cowboys join hall of fame

Averill, Carpenter, Wilson, Powell inducted in Billings

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Darv Averill always felt his two roping horses — Banana and Joe — were hall of fame material.

Banana, a chestnut quarter horse gelding, helped Averill become a dominant calf roper (now called tie-down roping). The two were inseparable for 18 rodeo seasons.

Banana died at the age of 30. He was not only a dream horse, but a cowboy bargain at \$400.

Joe, on the other hand, came at a steeper price. Averill paid \$5,000 for the bay quarter horse gelding.

Joe died suddenly in 1978 of colic



DARV AVERILL stands in front of the Montana Pro Rodeo Hall and Wall of Fame banner during induction ceremonies in Billings. Averill was one of four local cowboys inducted this year.

after a rodeo in California. He was en route to Montana when it happened.

Banana and Joe still may get their shot at the hall of fame, but Averill has the honor of getting there first.

In January he was inducted into the Montana Pro Rodeo Hall and Wall of Fame in Billings. He was a member of the second class, which also included Kalispell's Kenny Carpenter and Rolie (now spelled Raleigh) Wilson and Dick Powell of Babb.

Those inducted were either National Finals Rodeo contestants or Montana Pro Rodeo Champions; or were contract personnel, rodeo queens or rodeo committees.

Averill, a 57-year-old cowboy from Bigfork, said it was an "emotional experience," to say the least.

"It's pretty cool," he added. "Everywhere I go, people remember me."

Averill, in his heyday, was shooting for a world title the year Joe died.

"I never got on a horse that good (again)," he said.

"A machine for roping. Pound-for-

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Averill won six state circuit titles

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pound, the strongest horse I've ever ridden. At my age now to ride a horse like that, that would be suicide."

Both Joe and Banana helped Averill enjoy a very successful career as a calf roper. Averill picked up his Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association card in 1970 and won six straight Montana Summer Circuit titles (1970-75).

"I've been in over 500 pro rodeos," Averill said.

"Have roped in just about every major rodeo in the state."

Averill was a repeat winner at the famous Pendleton Rodeo in Oregon and won the PRCA rodeo in Kalispell several times (1972, 1975-76). In the 1970s, he finished second and third at the Calgary Stampede.

He also enjoyed big paydays at rodeos in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Puyallup, Wash., to name just a few.

"Coming home and winning your local rodeo, it's a neat accomplishment," Averill said.

Although Averill grew up on a dude ranch in Bigfork, which his father started back in the 1940s, he didn't get hooked on rodeos until he was "12 or 13," he said.

That happened at the Kalispell rodeo.

"The horsemanship," he said of what intrigued him the most. "The roping ability of the guys impressed me."

So in 1966, Averill started taking roping lessons from professional Fred Fellows. That same year Averill won the state high school rodeo championship.

"I always roped when I was a kid," Averill said. "I roped anything that moved."

Averill later fine-tuned his roping and horse skills with Dean Oliver, an eight-time world champion.

"Went to one of his rodeo schools in Great Falls in 1970," Averill said. "We've been friends ever since. He's been my biggest mentor."

"He taught me how to train roping horses to win," Averill continued.

"I taught rodeo school with him for eight years."

"It's a gift," Averill said of roping. "You see guys all over the country competing."

"You gotta work hard at it. It came easy for me."

It also requires a good horse, he said.

"Ninety percent of the guys are good," Averill said.

"The ones who have the best horses are the ones who win."

His rodeo success led to some promotional work on a grand scale.

Averill did two television commercials, one for Miller Beer and the other for Chevy trucks. That was in 1979 or 1980.



Fred Kobsted photo

DARV AVERILL in action during the calf roping competition at the Calgary Stampede in 1971.

The commercials were aired during baseball games and the Super Bowl.

In the Miller commercial, it was the typical western theme with cowboys rounding up cattle on the range.

Averill still ropes, but with his wife Sheila in team roping. The two do a lot of jackpot events in Arizona and Texas during the winter months.

Rodeo has been a key part of their family life as their daughter, Jalme, 27, competed in high school rodeos (barrel racing and team roping).

Daughter Crystal, 25, also ropes.

Carpenter, 45, was inducted in the hall of fame as a pick-up man. The Carpenter name has been associated with the sport of rodeo in the Flathead Valley and the state for many years.

"I was suprised, shocked, honored (to be inducted)," Carpenter said.

"The guys who select you for that are the bareback riders and bronc riders. For them to select you, it means

quite a bit. I worked awfully hard for a long time to do that."

Perhaps the highlight of Carpenter's rodeo career was working the National Rodeo Finals.

"Quite a thrill," he said.

"One hundred of the best bareback and saddle bronc horses are selected for that rodeo. The top 15 bareback riders and bronc riders compete on them."

Carpenter has worked rodeos from Houston to San Jose, Calif., to Cheyenne, Wyo. He was a pick-up man at the College National Finals Rodeo six times.

"Pretty much all over," said Carpenter of where he has worked.

"Mostly the western United States."

Along the way, Carpenter has done some team roping and rode a few boncs.

"Did very little of that," he said. "More of a hobby."

Wilson, who now lives in California, was inducted for bareback riding, and Powell for team roping.