

The Team Roping Journal's

EXTRA

AUGUST/2020

Travis Tryan

11-TIME NFR HEADER
AND 3-TIME
HORSE OF THE YEAR, WALT



Travis Tryan Life After Rodeo

Travis Tryan, who has amassed \$1.5 million in PRCA earnings in his 20-year career, now lives in Billings, Montana, with his wife, Hillary, and two daughters, Riley, 13, and Payton, 11. After 11 NFR qualifications and four PRCA/AQHA Horse of the Year titles with Walt (Precious Speck), Tryan stepped away from a full-time rodeo career, but still maintains involvement in the sport of team roping in a significant way.

By Chelsea Shaffer





CS: *What is your life-after-rodeo career?*

TT: I do a lot of roping schools and produce ropings with the Wrangler Team Roping Championships. I've got some trucks in the oilfield, too. A good friend of ours, Shane Johnson, showed us how that business works, and there was good opportunity to do that.

CS: *What are your roping schools like?*

TT: I've been doing a lot of them in Wyoming. I do a couple in Montana, too. I just do them up north, really. I focus on getting the fundamentals down and having fun with it. I don't overcomplicate things. The one thing I know that helps your catch percentage is getting into a great position on the steer. We've been having good results with the schools. I put them on my Facebook page or the Wrangler Team Roping website.

CS: *Are you missing rodeo much?*

TT: The only thing I miss is the high level of competition and certain events. I have so many other things going on right now that take my time. There's no time. I don't miss the grind of it. I enjoy watching my kids do the stuff they do, and that part is way more fun than rodeoing ever was. At one time, rodeoing was a lot of fun, but it's way more fun watching my kids do sports.

CS: *What have you learned as a producer?*

TT: You do the best job you possibly can and really care about the product you put out there. That's just how I approach things. It really shows for people. You can tell that people notice it, so that's what I really focus on, for sure.

CS: *What's going to be new at the Wrangler Finals this year?*

TT: We're adding another truck roping in the #8.5 and a couple Gold Diggers in the higher-numbered deals. We added an extra day, so it's now seven days instead of six. With the turnouts we've had, we needed to break it up even more. It's going to be a great finals and a lot of people want to come.

CS: *Do you have any goals in your roping right now?*

TT: I haven't been able to work on my roping like I want to. I'm focusing on the schools and the producing side of it. I like seeing people getting better. With my kids doing a lot of it, I know the effort and work you have to put into it at a high level, and I want to rope at a high level when I do it. I can't put in the time to achieve my goals, so I want to focus more on these other things. Eventually, I'll have more time to do it.

CS: *What kind of horses are you keeping around?*

TT: I don't even own a horse right now. If I do ever need to rope, I have good friends who have great horses I could always get on. I'm never without a horse. My goals are so different now with my kids, watching them and helping whatever they want to do.

CS: *And your kids aren't into roping right now?*

TT: My oldest likes to ride but not compete, and my youngest likes to run barrels a little. We focus on basketball and softball, so I'm just trying to provide them opportunities.

CS: *The Tryan family is notoriously competitive. Does that carry over into your parenting with the girls?*

TT: I'm fairly laid back when it comes to certain deals. When I watch them, I'm not near as competitive as I am when I do it. But I do also hold them accountable when they're not doing stuff right and they need to change something. I have a high standard for attitude and effort and everything else will come. I always tell anybody roping, even myself, that I want to maximize my talent—whatever that is. Mine was making the NFR. It wasn't winning the world title, but if I maximize my talent what else can I do? That's all I ask. That's the standard. It gets intense sometimes, but I'm fairly relaxed when it comes to that stuff. But they're both competitors and they won't back down. ■



TRJ FILE PHOTO/JAMES PHIFER

How to Properly Set Up a Run with Travis Tryan

Tryan talks through the initial stages of a team roping run from the header's perspective.

If you can be consistent and do the right thing over and over again, and pattern your horse to go to a spot, it makes it easier for you to rope. It makes it easier for you to set the run up to handle the steer and, in turn, that gives your heeler confidence to know what's coming. If you do the right thing over and over again, your heeler is going to feed off of that, catch more and throw faster, and get confidence in you and in the run. If you keep making that run over and over again, all of a sudden it doesn't matter where you are or what kind of money is up, you're confident because your horse is so patterned to do the right thing. Your mistakes will be limited.

In this shot, I've got my horse framed up. With my left hand, I'm holding him in until I ask him to go. I don't let my horse leave until the rope is tight from the steer's horns to the saddle horn. At that point, when my horse makes a little bit of a move, that will bring the steer with me. He should follow exactly the moves my horse makes—which is why it's so important to have the rope tight before I move—so I can keep the steer's head all the way across the arena.

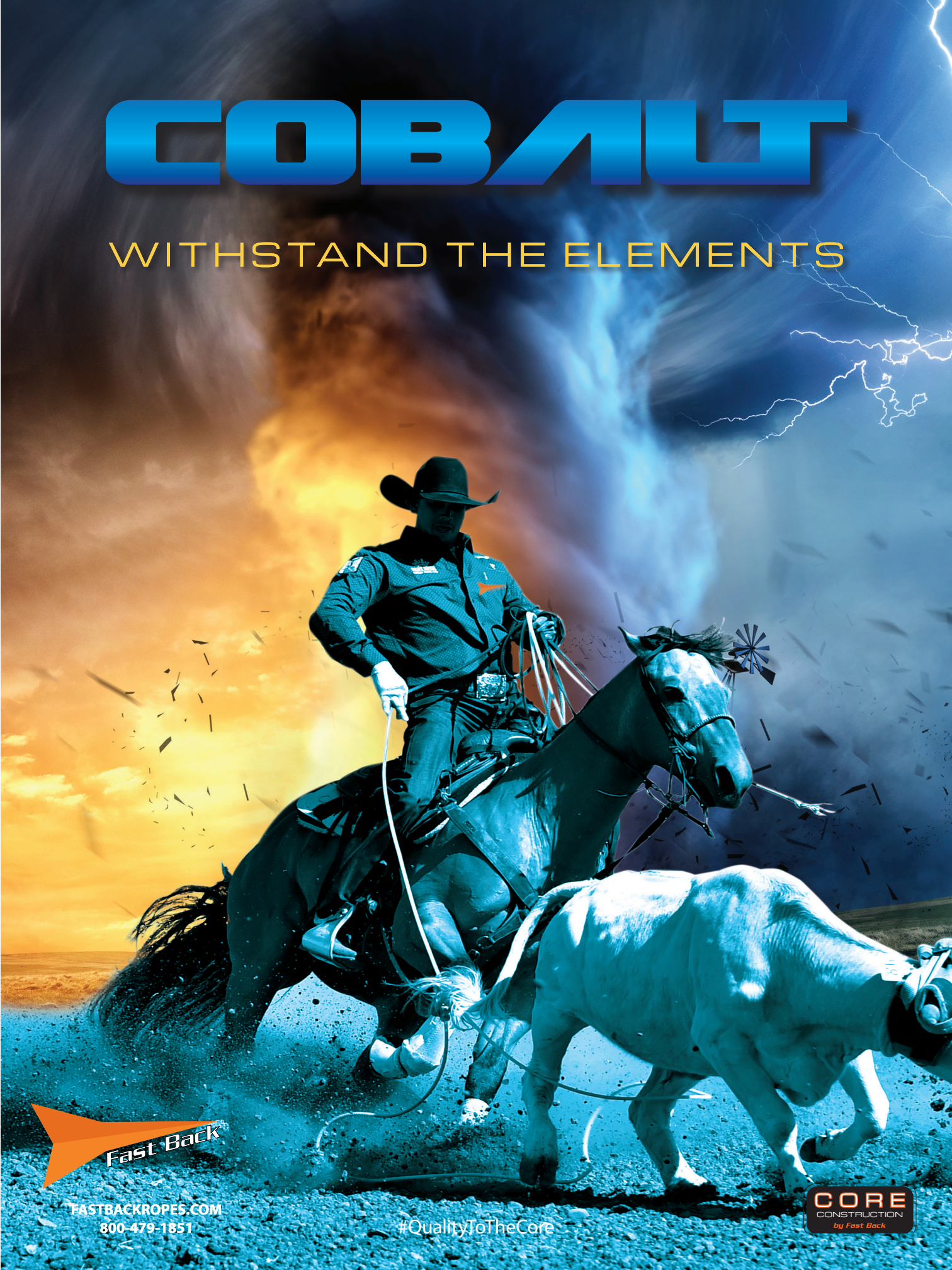
You hear people say, "You need to ride to the steer." That's true in a sense, but not literally. What I like to tell everybody is you need to ride to the position that you're going to rope from relative to the

position of the steer. You're going to ride to your spot to the left of the steer—not actually to the steer. Teach yourself and your horse to leave the box and get there as fast as you can. Never sacrifice that when you practice.

You want to have the confidence that your horse is going to do the things you trained him to do and he's going to give you the same look every time. When you have that confidence, competing and making a good, solid run, no matter what, your draw makes it a lot easier. He knows, no matter what, he has to run to a spot. That's what you're training him to do. It just becomes a reaction. ■

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Dream-Team Runs with Travis Tryan



KURT STINKE PHOTO



KURT STINKE PHOTO

1 That steer was moving pretty fast across there. It's a normal shot—my top strand is a little lower than I would want it—my horse is stopping and the steer was strong. There's nothing unusual about this shot.

When I threw, I'm was looking at my loop and the steer jumping into my loop. I was waiting for that to happen before I pulled my slack. You want to leave the loop on the ground as long as you can. My hand is ready to pull my slack as soon as I see it. By the next frame, I'll be started up with my slack to dally. My horse is working good, my loop looks good and everything is coming together just right.

2 We had a steer that ducked his head—lowered it pretty good—so, it was really important for my horse to stay free and stay with me for that extra stride so I could keep it on the horns. Walt is so free, and I rode him good enough that I had to actually cue him to leave.

I'm in the transition of getting ready to dally and pull him off. I've got to cue him because I've got him too free, but my body position is square with the horse, not hanging off one side.



3 I'm starting to get that steer's head here. My positioning is still great. I'm just about to square the the steer up and soften the corner and get him ready to heel fast. After all this—and I think we were 5.0 on that steer—he still has not dropped his shoulder and not left or left hard. He's still framed up the whole way and has kept his positioning excellent. When your a steer does that, it softens the corner. When he hits out there and is ready to heel, his feet will come together good and the heeler can really read it.

My whole body and legs are not hanging off one side or the other. I'm just keeping right in the middle of my horse and that helps cue him to leave and do the right thing.

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"Now days I teach a lot of roping schools and produce ropings. Currently my "go to" rope is the Cobalt. Whether I'm heading or heeling, the Cobalt withstands weather fluctuations and keep its great balance and feel.

Whenever I hand one of my students a Cobalt to swing, they usually fall in love with the smooth feel, and the next time I see them they are roping with a Cobalt.

Thanks Fast Back for continuing to strive to make the best ropes on the market."

Travis Tryan

11-Time NFR Qualifier

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STEP BY STEP with Travis Tryan

BOB CLICK PHOTO



4 This run was a similar outside setup to Reno. This is Sisters, Oregon. This was our second steer. We had placed in the first round and we had a good steer. I was pretty aggressive. At these two-headers, you have to be pretty aggressive. The steer stayed framed up. I didn't reach really; I just roped as I was coming to him. I'm still having to cue him to leave, because he's staying with me and keeping his shoulder up and keeping framed up while I'm dallying. In the next sequence, I will be able to get his head and turn him and make him easy for Michael [Jones] to heel. You'll notice this steer has his head up, where that other one had

his head down. There's really no difference in how you handle them. When you dally, you don't want to leave on a loose rope. It should be tight before your horse leaves, that way you always have control of the steer.

It looks like I'm in the middle of kicking my horse. If I can't remember if I either dallied over the top of my horn or if I roped out a little bit. We were aggressive on that one. We won the second round. We were like 4.8, and we won the average and had already won second in the first round. We were trying to max out the rodeo.

DAN HUBBELL PHOTO



5 Here, I'm just starting the steer's head. I'm holding my horse up because I want to make sure I soften the corner and make him fast for Michael to heel. This is Colorado Springs, so this would have been a July rodeo. By this point, I have to hold my horse up and not cue him as much because we'd been rodeoing for a full month. Everything in this picture is exactly what I want. The rope is tight when I'm leaving—I just have to hold my horse up a little more. He's obviously not as free after you've rodeoed on

him for a month and you have to be 4 seconds to place. I'm just trying to keep him where he doesn't drop his shoulder and makes those handles bad where those steers switch hard and their legs don't come together.

My left arm is in a good position, cueing my horse to stay with me just a little longer until that steer gets squared up. My upper and lower body is right in the middle of the horse.

Often, I had to adjust to the kind of setup I was in and the time of year because my horse allowed me to win. Sometimes, I'd have to cue him to leave and sometimes I'd have to hold him up. It just took one day of practicing where I'd free him up and just go rope on him, or maybe one jackpot and a few practice steers. He wanted to be free, so, as long as I could take my time and practice, he was fine. But in late July, I didn't ever get to. June and July, I just didn't practice because I'm was on the fly. ■



HUBBELL RODEO PHOTOS

TRAVIS TRYAN ON LOVING AND LOSING WALT

Remembering Walt, the ProRodeo Hall of Fame's first team roping horse.

—By Kendra Santos

Travis Tryan crossed the \$1 million career team roping earnings milestone during the 2009 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo. Appropriately, he was aboard his bay best friend, Walt, the reigning and four-time Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association/American Quarter Horse Association Head Horse of the Year, when he did it. Travis rode Walt at all nine of his NFRs (2001–2009). Brother Clay rode him at NFR '01, too, which also was his first.

The only time Tryan stepped off of Walt at the NFR in all those years was for five rounds at the 2005 Finals, where he rode him in Rounds 1 and 2, and Rounds 8 through 10, after getting on Gold Digger in the others. Trevor Brazile subbed in for Jake Barnes after he lost his

thumb in the fifth round that year, and Tryan offered Walt to Brazile, so he could finish out the week for Kory Koontz in Rounds 6 through 10.

Tryan was roping with Michael Jones in 2010, but entered a few of the spring rodeos in California with Koontz that year, because their partners both had other business to tend to.

Walt died of an aortic aneurysm April 24, 2010, at morning slack in Clovis, California.

I am proud to say that Tryan and I only choked up to the point of a complete pause one time during the conversation about his late great horse. I am also happy to admit that I'll likely simultaneously smile and tear up every time I think or speak of Walt for the rest of my days.

TT: The day I lost Walt kind of felt like a bad dream, really. I don't know if surreal is the right word for it or not, because I knew exactly what was happening. It was about 9:00 in the morning, and I had just gotten done warming him up and blowing him out in the warm-up arena, so he was stretched out good. That's when he felt the best. He came out of the warm-up arena kind of wanting to run off, like he always did. He was always jacked up and ready to go.

I was headed over to the box. They were just calling the team roping to start, and Kory and I were the ninth team out. I was walking Walt over there, and he kind of spooked and started going sideways. I'd never been on a horse that did that, but I'd seen it. I saw it happen to a horse at

the rodeo in Red Lodge one time, when I was a kid. Walt was heading toward the tractor harrow, and he lost control. I was trying to get him steered away from it. He never did hit the ground, which was kind of fitting. He laid down on the tractor harrow, and I went into the back part of the tractor. I got away pretty clean, really. He laid down pretty easy for me.

It was totally out of character for Walt to spook like he did that day. He spooked at stuff, don't get me wrong. I've had him jump 5 feet. But then he's done. When he didn't stop and lost control, I knew what was happening and that it was over. They lose control and can't stop.

I don't think Walt could possibly have had a heart attack, because his heart was too big. But apparently, a vein coming from his heart gave way. There's no way to anticipate or prevent that from happening. It was a bad dream, but I was living it.

Once he went down, it was only a few seconds before it was over. I just laid my hands on him and thanked him for all he did for me. I was numb.

All the cowboys that day were so cool. My wife, Hillary, was in the stands, and hadn't seen it, so I went to tell her. Walt was her best friend, too. She ran a steer on him that winter when we were at the house practicing. She said it felt like they were floating to the steer. As hard as Walt ran, he felt like he just ran on top of the ground. I'm so glad she got to run that steer.

Walt was just so much fun to have around. The roping part was great. Shoot, he was awesome and did things right, no matter what. But he was so much more than that to me. He was just a cool horse.

I was up 10 minutes after Walt died. I got on my brother Clay's horse, and had a good shot to win first or second, but split the horns.

Had it not been a team event, I wouldn't have run that steer. I'd have left,

and wouldn't have cared. Roping didn't matter much to me at that particular moment. It takes a little bit of life out of you when you lose part of the family.

Kory and I had to run another steer that afternoon, and I beat the steer out of the chute. I don't know if I was in shock or what. I gave it my best effort when I got in the corner, but I really didn't care to be there. The show must go on. It always does, and nothing stops. You have to bow up, swallow it and go on.

Some bulldoggers unsaddled Walt for me, and took all his stuff to my trailer. Guys got his shoes off for me, and some of his tail, so I didn't have to do it. I don't even know who all did everything, but I can't thank those guys enough. After the autopsy, Bert McGill buried Walt in a pretty spot under an oak tree at his place.

We drove out of Clovis about 4:00 that afternoon, with my daughter Riley's pony, Miss Diggys, and my practice horse, Kurt, in the trailer, headed for Guymon, Oklahoma, which is about 1,400 miles away. Those long drives are never easy, but they're a whole lot easier when you've had a good day, that's for sure.

Walt had just turned 20 when he died, but never did act old or start to go downhill. You know it's coming someday, but how it happened and when was a total shock. He was in great shape and looked as good as he ever did.

I went from having three horses to none. My palomino horse, Gold Digger, had colic surgery that December, and couldn't go anymore. He's been enjoying the rest of his life out in the pasture. Duke, which is the bay horse I bought from Speed (Williams) that year, died not long before Walt of liver failure.

It all happened at once. But I'm not the only one who ever went through stuff like that, and I don't want this to be a sob story. I had one great horse and two really good ones, and suddenly I was leaving

California in April of 2010 without any.

That's hard to take when you've been taking care of business, but you can't let it get ahold of you and beat you down. You have to move on, go get other horses and do good on them.

Walt was a huge part of my career. He's was the best for so long, and I made the majority of the runs on him. The only time he really had off was when we were waiting for his ringbone to fuse, or for him to heal up from colic surgery one summer. At one point, we figured that we won over 70 rodeos on him, from Reno to Cheyenne, and ropings like the George Strait Team Roping Classic.

Until you find that horse that fits you, it's hard out here. I never wanted to ride just anything, and drive up and down the road without being well prepared. It's was a change not to have Walt, but I looked at it as a new beginning. I could have let it get ahold of me and affect the rest of my career, or I could hold my head high and go on.

No horse could have replaced Walt. He's got his own special spot forever. But nothing lasts forever, and you have to go on. It isn't easy, but you have to get back in the swing of things.

I had 10 great years with Walt, and that's a lot for a head horse. He was sound, and he was healthy. He was on alfalfa hay and Equine Senior. He didn't need any drugs, and he got to go out on top. He never lost a step, and he loved his job.

When he was in his pen after the colic surgery that summer and we'd bring the steers up the return alley, he'd buck around his pen. He wanted to get back to it, and didn't want to sit around. Horses like him don't show up every day, much less stick around that long.

He left sooner than I expected, and in a different way than I expected. But what a blessing Walt was to me and my family. ■