

COWDOG RODEAR AT THE NRCHA FUTURITY

The Cowdog Rodear Fall Bash Finals held during the Snaffle Bit Futurity paid well and drew a crowd of cow horse enthusiasts.

By Jatona Sucamele

When the Cowdog Rodear Fall Bash Finals was held the evening of Tuesday, October 10 in the Justin Arena during the Snaffle Bit Futurity, it was Louisiana man, Keith Gilleon, who took first and third in the Open division with his dogs Reo and Roc, respectively. Tommy Blessing won the Non-Pro with Clyde while long-time NRCHA sponsor and owner of the stallion One Time Pepto, Jeffrey Matthews, took reserve with his red and white female, Liz. Thanks to generous added prize money in the amount of \$2,000 in the Open and \$1,500 for the Non-Pro, payouts exceeded \$7,000.

The couple behind the Rodear competition movement is Merle and Sandy Newton, stock dog trainers who moved to Texas from California in 2015. They have been very active the past 12 years in Rodear in the Western states and are now working to establish Rodear competitions in other states including Texas.

OPEN

Keith Gilleon, Ethel, Louisiana, achieved a perfect score to win the Open division with his homebred and trained Reo. His second dog in the finals, Roc, actually won more money than Reo when preliminary round earnings were added. The two dogs helped



MARK MICHAELS

Cowdog Rodear competitions showcase skillfully trained cattle dogs working as they would in a ranching environment.

Keith bring home a hefty \$2,402 for the weekend.

Keeping busy working cattle and dogs are Gilleon's "side-job." He also has an automatic gate company that he calls his day job, but is always ready to load up his horse and dogs and head to a competition. "I've been to quite a few Rodears, I like them, they're fun," Gilleon said.

"These two (dogs) are out of my bloodlines that I've had for about 25 years," Gilleon said. "I raised these and trained them." Gilleon uses his dogs at home and trials them also. "God has blessed me beyond measure with this, I give Him all the glory."

NON-PRO

Non-Pro winner Tommy Blessing also took third place with his second dog, Toc, in the Finals. The two dogs rounded up nearly \$1,100 in the preliminaries and finals for Blessing. Clyde

is a 4-year-old dog that Jimmy Walker and Chris Thomson started.

"It's [Rodear] great, it feels really good just to be able to be in that show at the NRCHA. I think it's a big step for them and I won't forget showing there," Blessing said.

The Non-Pro Reserve winner, Jeffrey Matthews and his dog Liz, who was trained by Sandi Newton, says he has had his dog since she was born. "I've been working dogs for less than a year; my wife got me into this," Matthews said. "We've been together for 11 years and she had just met Merle and Sandi when we started out, so I had been around it, but wasn't in on it. We had a litter of pups and this pup picked me, she just looked at me like I was the best thing in the world – still does, so I just got started."

Matthews was relaxed on Finals day and had good reasoning behind his calmness.

/////// CIRCLE UP



Top photo: Tommy Blessing and Clyde won the Non-Pro class.

Left photo: Keith Gilleon with his reserve champion dog Roc.

Bottom photo: Finalists left to right: Sonya Bloomberg and Boss; Sandi Newton with Isabelle and Bree; Keith Gilleon with Reo and Roc; Tommy Blessing with Toc and Clyde; Kaul Runfola and SJ; Jeffrey Matthews and Liz; and Brennen Harmon with May.



"Don't take this wrong, but when I was cutting if I made the finals it was a relief and I thought, just go enjoy your horse the hard part's over," he said.

For Matthews the bottom-line in any competition or work is that it makes you better when you go to town. And he believes that you can learn as much

from the bad runs as you can from the good ones. "There is so much camaraderie at the Rodear events and everyone wants to help," Matthews added.

"It's very important to me to have and pass on true horsemanship, and most importantly to make my wife proud of me," Matthews laughed.

/////// WHAT IS RODEAR

The goal of the Rodear event is to revolutionize modern cow dog competitions by allowing the handler, horse and dog to work in the same way in which they would at home on the ranch. Rodear puts a great deal of emphasis on the stockmanship of the handler and the quiet and controlled manner in which the dog maneuvers the cattle.

Rodear is a point and timed event where the essence of the competition is to maneuver a small group of cattle through a number of obstacles in a set amount of time. Each obstacle has one or more exits with the most points gathered through the most difficult exit for the cattle.

Most obstacles truly need partnership from the dog and horse/rider to negotiate. For this reason, use of the horse is not restricted in any way. With the handler on horseback, Rodear provides a great place for individuals to enjoy their horses and work their cow dogs on a course that either takes place in an arena or cross-country.

Rodear organizers Merle and Sandi Newton train dogs at their Crystal Rose Cow Dog College. Merle said that he and Sandi hail from a ranching background, and that just like rodeo sports and cutting, which grew out of necessity on a ranch, that's also where Rodear came from. Over the past 40 years, the couple has managed remote cattle ranches in the mountains of Northern California and Oregon and had to depend on their dogs. Their ideal for the competitions is seeing work done as it would be on a ranch.

Jeffrey and Sheri Matthews have been sponsors of Rodear and helped with organizing the competitions in Texas, as well as publicizing events and gathering sponsorship.

Well-known performance horse enthusiast Jerry Durant, of the Durant Auto Dealerships, helped kick off the competitions that have been held in Texas over the past two years by coming on as the title sponsor and hosting many events at his Silverado on the Brazos Equine Facility in Weatherford. Other familiar sponsors thus far have included Matthews Cutting Horses, Oswood Stallion Station, Bob Kingsley's Top 40, Nichols Trailers, First Financial Bank, Core Balance, Runfola Equine Dentistry and the Newton's Crystal Rose Cow Dog College.

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