

Step 1 – The stereotypes of the wild west

King of the Cowboys

By Ty Murray, 2003

" So," HE SAID, "why do you do it?"

I've been giving interviews most of my life, so this one was nothing unusual. We were outside the locker room at a Professional Bull Riders (PBR) event sitting on a stack of portable seats, the kind you'd find on an arena floor during a concert. The reporter asked some intelligent questions-it's always nicer when these guys have done their homework-but after a few minutes he asked that question, the one I'd heard more than any other since I'd begun riding.

The people who ask that question are always sincere. After several thousand interviews I expect it. But I still have a hard time answering it, not because I don't know why I'm a cowboy, but because the concept of the cowboy way is so foreign to some people that I have a hard time boiling it down to a simple sound bite.

"I'm a cowboy because I've always been a cowboy," I said to this reporter. It was the umpteenth time I'd used that line, but I wasn't sure my media buddies got it. "I was born to it."

The reporter's eyes glazed over, and I knew I needed to do a better job of explaining myself. As far as I was concerned, asking a cowboy why he's a cowboy is like asking a Frenchman why he's French. Still, I needed to give it another shot.

"A cowboy is a cowboy no matter how he makes his living," I said. "Not all of us wear chaps and hats. You'll find plenty cowboys wearing Brooks Brothers' suits on Wall Street, or playing in the NFL. Those real estate developers who borrow millions to build big office towers, a lot of them are cowboys. The cowboy way is about how you approach things, whether you're talking about a businessman, an artist, or a housewife. Being a cowboy is in your DNA. You either have it or you don't."

I still wasn't sure I was getting through to this reporter, so I tried another tack. "Look. When I won my first all-around championship. I was twenty years old. Almost every reporter asked me if I was

surprised by how well I'd done so early in my career. That seemed funny to me. They asked it as if I just woke up one morning and found a gold buckle on my belt. I'd been working to win that first all-around championship since I was two years old.

"Being a cowboy was never a conscious choice. I never considered doing anything in life other than rodeo.

"Why do I do it? From the time I was old enough to walk I've always known where I wanted to go with my life, and I grew up in an environment where if I worked my butt off every day, I knew I would get there.

"I do it because it's all I've ever wanted, and all I've ever known. Not a lot of people can say that."

MY COWBOY GENES run deep. Riding and ranching have been my family's trade for almost a century, and our history mirrors the history of rodeo itself. Near the turn of the millennium I was given the nickname "the king of the cowboys," but at the turn of the last century, members of my father's family were blazing trails that make my life look tame by comparison.

