

Introducing 2012 Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame Inductee...

Irvin G. Wortman (1917 - 1994)

Irvin Grover Wortman was born July 31, 1917 in Gallatin Gateway, MT. He went to school in Bozeman, MT, and started competing in rodeos when he was fourteen years old. In the mid-thirties, he went South, and got a job on the King Ranch in Texas, where he cowboied and rodeoed. He met his lifelong love down there, Rena Hymer, and they married December 15, 1938, in Tuscon, AZ. Rena traveled to rodeos with Irv until 1945, when he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps as a military policeman. He was discharged in a couple of years, and went back to the rodeo circuit, his wife by his side. Irvin was a member of the Turtle Association, a precursor to the RCA, which is now the PRCA. He rodeoed hard between the years 1938 to 1945 and 1947 until 1956. He was an all around hand, competing in Saddle Bronc, Bulldogging, Bull riding, Calf Roping, Bareback Riding, and Wild Horse events—and he had success in all of them. Saddle Bronc Riding was always his favorite event.

To support his wife, and his rodeo habit, he worked various jobs, and shod horses after work, until way past dark, in order to make ends meet, and earn entry fees and traveling money. Some of his rodeo achievements include: 1938 Pendleton Roundup NW Bucking Horse Contest—1st place and a Hamley saddle 1943 or 44 Arizona rodeo—All Around, 1st in Bulldogging, 3rd in Saddle Bronc, and 3rd in Bareback 1948 Black Hills Range Days, 1st in Bull Riding 1949 Midland Empire Fair, Billings, MT—he set a new World’s record in Bulldogging, clocking 3.1 seconds 1950 Huron, SD Rodeo—All Around Champion, 1st in Bulldogging, 4th in Calf Roping 1951 Huron, SD Rodeo—All Around Champion, 1st in Bareback, 2nd in Saddle Bronc 1952 Madison Square Garden, New York, NY 1st in Wild Horse Race, 2nd in Bulldogging, 3rd in Saddle Bronc Tuscon, AZ, Convair Stampede, date unknown—1st in Bulldogging, 3rd in Saddle Bronc, 3rd in Bareback Bronc, 3rd in Bull Riding Mobridge, SD—1st in Bulldogging, 3rd in Saddle Bronc, 3rd in Bull Riding

Irv competed and placed in many rodeos, including the North MT State Fair Rodeo produced by Gene Autry, Cheyenne Frontier Days, Walnut Grove, MN, and others--winning in four different events. His family enjoys his many buckles. Irvin Wortman had the ability and skill to become a World Champion, but never achieved that because he wouldn’t rodeo without his family, and it simply became too difficult to go on the road with four people at that time, since he was not earning enough to support his family, take them on the road, and pay rodeo fees. In 1953, Irvin, Rena (“Dinks”), and their two children, Rick and Lanell moved to Stevensville, Montana. Irv went to work for the U.S. Forest Service. They bought forty acres on Burnt Fork Creek, and went to ranching.

Both Irv and Dinks had a love for, and a rapport with, animals of all kinds. They raised good Quarter Horses, which Irv trained and sold to the rodeo crowd, along with a herd of cattle. They purchased an additional forty acres, and continued to expand their

livestock business. In later years, they added llamas, and miniature donkeys to their menagerie. Irvin even had a llama trained to drive to a cart. Irvin's abilities as a "horse whisperer" were well recognized, long before the term became known—in fact, you could expand that to include all classes of animals, as he had a rapport with all of them that ventured into the realm of the mysterious. Stan Swartz, DVM, retired, and a long time friend and business partner of Irvin's, describes him as "a cowboy's cowboy, with skills and understanding of horse psychology and behavior. Irv was a great humble human being, kind and full of empathy for others." Swartz also heard Irvin described by others cowboys to be a "tough and gifted hand." He was personally modest and close mouthed about himself, letting his abilities speak for him.

Stan tells a story on Irv when he was aged sixty plus and still breaking colts for the general public—many of them hard to handle. Stan says, "One day Irv came over to where we needed to move some cattle, and as usual, brought a young, green horse he was breaking. I noticed he had his bareback rigging on him, instead of a saddle." After a little while it became apparent why, as the colt broke in half, and was really tearing up both the air and the pasture. Irv just rode him through it, with a big grin on his face, gathered up the colt, and said, "Good thing I brought my bareback rigging today." Daughter Lanell Turner has a special memory of her parents in their later years. They had a calf to doctor, and it was out in the pasture, so Irv decided to rope it—but not on horseback. He got Dinks behind the wheel (and she was so short, she looked UNDER the wheel) of their old pickup, and he mounted himself on the tire, which was attached to the front of the truck. Away they went, gunning and bouncing across the field—up and down, around and around.....until the old calf roper caught the calf!

Irvin was a true horseman. In his later years, after he had both of his hips replaced—one twice, because he got horseback too soon—he built a specialized chute and mounting platform, where he would put his colts for gentling, sacking out, saddling, and mounting. They were cross-tied, and he would wallow all over them, and they would be pretty well bomb proofed before he rode them off. Irvin literally died horseback, when 77 years old. He rode off on a young horse, and the colt came home without him. It was obvious from the torn up ground where he was found, that some kind of altercation had taken place there, but since what happened was between Irv and the horse, and the horse wasn't talking, only God knows the details. He was a true cowboy, and he died with his boots on, doing what he loved most—riding horses.

Irvin G. Wortman passed away on October 1, 1994, and is buried at Riverview Cemetery, Stevensville, MT.

The information for the rodeo years was taken from a number of old newspaper clippings from the time, which had been saved by Irvin.