

Midnight the Devil Horse

Billie DeLancey
Parish House Museum Director

Midnight was foaled in Alberta, Canada in 1910 on Jim McNab's ranch, and he may still hold the title as the "greatest bucking horse of all time" by cowboys and rodeo fans alike.

The stories conflict on how this horse started bucking – one states he was spooked by a Model T Ford that backfired. Another claims Midnight started bucking when a tumbleweed blew underneath him. However it happened, this big, black, and intelligent Percheron-Morgan bucked his way into the hearts of rodeo fans and was dubbed the "Devil Horse" by the cowboys he tossed in the air and others who hoped they didn't draw his name.

It was literally impossible for a cowboy to make a qualified 10-second ride on Midnight. Contestants felt that to draw this horse was an automatic elimination. Earl Thode, the 1927 champion bronc rider at Cheyenne Frontier Days drew Midnight in the 1929 finals.

"Hell, he can't be rode," Thode said, and he was right. Midnight bucked him off within a few seconds. In 1930, the bronc riders protested the use of Midnight in the finals. The committee considered this complaint, but after reviewing the rule that had been in effect since the first Frontier Days more than 30 years earlier that stated, "This show bars neither man or horse," Midnight stayed in the competitions.

Midnight had a few different owners before Verne Elliott and his partner Ed McCarty, who supplied stock for rodeos, heard about Midnight and sent four cowboys to Canada to try the buck and find out if he was really as good as the stories claimed. The men purchased Midnight in 1928, and it didn't take Elliott long to realize what a prize they had in "Middy".

Once during a rodeo in Nebraska, a luckless cowboy fell on his head when bucked off by the 1,300-lb Devil Horse and was knocked unconscious. Midnight stopped bucking, looked back and trotted to the lifeless form on the ground. Spectators held their breath. A woman fainted. With his sensitive nostrils Midnight nuzzled the motionless body of the man for an instant as if to say, "I'm sorry, cowboy."

Five years later, Midnight slipped past his prime. He made his last appearance at Cheyenne Frontier Days on July 29, 1933 after Turk Greenough, that year's bronc riding champion, made an exhibition ride on him. Until then, Elliott said, Midnight had never been ridden except on one occasion when he was drugged and twice when he was sick.

Elliott then retired Midnight and put him out to pasture on his ranch along the St Vrain River and he was never ridden again. Midnight died on November 5, 1936 and was buried there along Hwy 66 just east of CR 17 six miles south of Johnstown. In April 1966, both Midnight and his colt, Five Minutes To Midnight, were reinterred with great ceremony at what is now the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

Compiled from stories in: *Midnight: story of a champion buckler*, Susan Childs, unidentified newspaper story, undated. *Daddy of 'Em All*. Robert D. Hanesworth, Flintlock Publishing, Cheyenne, WY, 1967. Various Johnstown Breeze stories, 1936, 1937.



Creta Elliott (Verne's wife) with Midnight and Broken Box at the Verne Elliott Ranch.

Cowboy Dick Griffith beside a monument erected over Midnight's grave on Elliott's ranch. He was exhumed in 1966 and reinterred at the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Museum in Oklahoma City.



The Historic Parish House and Museum

701 Charlotte Street
Johnstown, Colorado 80534

970-587-0278
www.JHSCO.org

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