

Consistency Is The Key

Riders showcase their versatile ranch horses.

By Jill J. Dunkel

On Jan. 12, versatility ranch horse competitors returned to where the competition debuted - the Fort Worth Stock Show. The Stock Show hosted the first AQHA Versatility Ranch Horse competition in January 2002. Each year, 15 riders return to the Will Rogers Memorial Coliseum to showcase their ranch horses during the first weekend of the Stock Show.

This year, the individual who won the very first Versatility Ranch Horse show claimed the title once again. Joe Wolter, Aspermont, Texas, rode Strawberry Boon to win the class. Consistency in each event was key to Wolter's success. He placed second in trail, third in cutting, second in ranch riding, sixth in working ranch horse and in the top seven in halter.

Strawberry Boon is a 2000 red roan stallion by Peptoboonsmal out of Shiny Star by Bob Acre Doc. Wolter purchased the horse from Jack McComber, who raised him. "We were partners on him for a few years, had a lot of fun, and I own him now," Wolter said.

"We've been breeding a few mares to him, and I enjoy having a nice horse. I ride horses for other people, and everybody knows when it's your own, they kind of get put on the back burner. But I've been camping on him in preparation for this deal."

Wolter rides a number of 2-year-olds for a variety of people, ranging from backyard horsemen and people who might show, to serious cutting enthusiasts. Prior to going out on his own, Wolter trained horses for the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas.

"I've got a few 3-year-old futurity prospects for other people this year. I want to show here at Fort Worth again [in NCHA events]. I haven't for two or three years I guess. The last time I showed, I was with the [Four] Sixes, and made the Limited Open finals here. I'd like to repeat that and maybe do better," he said.

Wolter is excited about the future of

his stallion and Strawberry Boon's offspring. "We are starting some of his 2-year-olds this spring. I really like them," he said. "They are out of some pretty good mares, so it ought to be fun."

Another stallion in the field of 15 horses stood out in the crowd, gaining momentum throughout the day. Waggoner Ranch's 11-year-old sorrel stallion, Doc O Boots, came away from the show with second place, after winning both the ranch riding and working ranch horse classes.

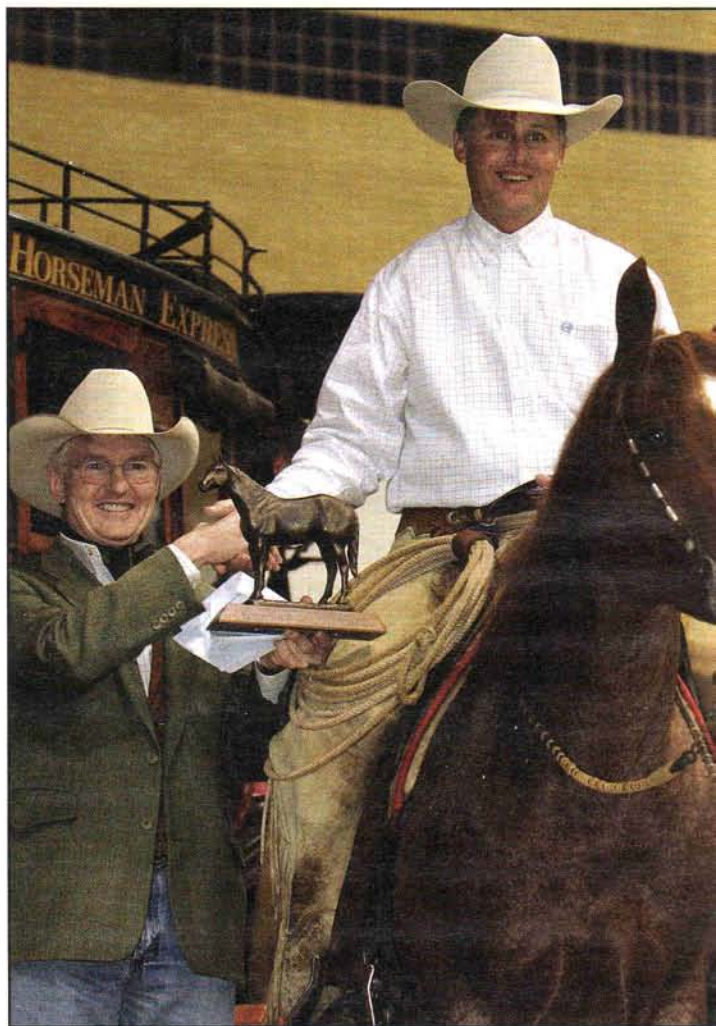
After a seventh-place finish in trail and receiving a no score for his rider two-handing in the cutting, things didn't appear to be going the horse's way. But a quiet and smooth go in ranch riding and a crowd-raising run in the working ranch horse class brought the stallion, exhibited by J.R. Winter, into third place. A strong finish in the halter vaulted Doc O Boots into second, over third-place overall finisher Dozen Plus Freckles and Kim Lindsey.

"Doc O Boots has been shown a bunch in reining, so he makes it look easy," said Winter. "He's good leaded and a strong stopper. The ground wasn't real good, but I was able to send him down there with some speed. The pattern was kind of a disadvantage for us because he's got a really good turn. And with only one spin, it's hard to get the momentum up."

Winter grabbed the crowd's attention when his saddle blankets started slipping out from under the saddle as he worked his cow. He did not notice the problem at first.

Before the class, Winter let the stallion air up and loosened his saddle. "I thought I'd tighten him up just before my run, and I forgot. About the second time we boxed the cow on the end, he turned back and the saddle really moved on me. I knew I was in trouble," Winter said. "But we went ahead and kept working, and he stayed locked on that cow."

Winter did not realize his saddle blankets had slipped off his horse's hips



Joe Wolter accepts his award for Versatility Ranch Horse trophy from Ed Bass, the Stock Show. Wolter won the very first AQHA Versatility Ranch Horse competition at the Stock Show in 2002.



Joe Wolter and Strawberry Boon work their calf in the cutting before driving it out of the arena and penning the calf. Wolter finished third in the cutting and won the

onto the ground.

"We went down the fence one time and did a good job there. We got to the other end, and I looked back and saw my blankets lying out there in the arena. I had to shift my weight just to stay on," he said. "I thought the run was going OK, and would try fencing one more time. We flew down the fence and luckily the saddle didn't roll off. I figured

we'd just take a face plant

After fencing a second time, he said he heard someone in the crowd say "Go ahead," so he jerked the calf and headed for the cow. "I thought she would stay straighter. I would take another swing or two to get in a good position to throw, but I ducked to the right. I just let the rope and it went on," he said.