

# IN MEMORIAM

# FINGER ROCK NORTON

## 1962—1977

by Janet S. Herring

Holidays inevitably bring traffic accidents, but little mention is ever made of the animal fatalities. This Memorial Day weekend just past saw the loss of FINGER ROCK NORTON, a great horse who won't go without a fitting eulogy.

FINGER ROCK, the big dun gelding with the blaze face, owned by Bob Cooley of Petaluma, was a well-known and well-thought-of mount in the California stock horse world. The wins to which he carried his young owner and his well-known cow horse trainer, Bob Knudson of Paso Robles, are numerous.

The Crawford Cooleys bought the 15.1-hand Quarter Horse gelding for their son in 1972. David Roush owned FINGERS prior to the Cooleys, and before that FINGERS (by Buckskin Sage by Johnny Niles and out of Going For Me by Frosty Sire), was a champion hackamore horse in Nevada—where he was raised on a ranch.

Under the Cooleys' ownership and Knudson's expert handling, FINGERS competed in the World's Championship All-Around Stock Horse Contest in Long Beach for five years and consistently showed the world what a good, solid stock horse is made of—strength, stamina, skill and try.

In his first year of competition at Long Beach, he was the Cutting Champion. The following year the gelding was the Reserve Champion Cutting Horse, missing the champion spot by one point. In 1975 a Junior Division was added to the All-Around Stock Horse Contest; Bob Cooley entered and rode his FINGERS to the first Junior World Champion Stock Horse title with a lead of 13 points.

Bob and his horse continued on into winners' circles that year. By the end of the season, he and FINGERS had won seven out of ten of their California Reined Cow Horse Association (CRCHA) Non-Pro Stock Horse classes. Bob and FINGERS emerged the 1975 CRCHA Non-Pro Stock Horse Champions, and these two were in the Junior CRCHA Top Ten Finalists at the Snaffle Bit Futurities in 1974 and 1975.

After Bob graduated from junior competition, Bob Knudson began showing FINGERS on the open circuit again, returning to Long Beach in 1976, where FINGERS was again the Reserve Champion Cutting Horse, as well as Champion Working Cow Horse.

A few months later, Bob Cooley rode

FINGERS to win the Bar Chief Perpetual Trophy in the working cow horse class at the annual Poly Royal intercollegiate horse show held at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo (where Bob attends school), each spring.

Last fall at the 1976 Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno, Bob Cooley, dressed as King Kong, piloted his trusty FINGERS to a win in the Wild Bunch masquerade stock horse class. King Kong's identity didn't remain a secret very long; most of the Reno Coliseum crowd recognized FINGERS right away!

This year was nearly a repeat performance for FINGERS and the two Bobs who knew him best. At the age of 15, the big buckskin returned to Long Beach with his trainer aboard. As in years past, bad breaks kept the World Champion All-Around Stock Horse title itself, from him, but the stock horse world knew that FINGER ROCK NORTON was the epitome of a cow horse champion and they created an award just for him. FINGER ROCK NORTON, alone, the only horse ever to compete in the World Champion Stock Horse Contest each of the five years since its origin, was presented with an award all his own—The World's Toughest All-Around Horse.

That was in February. In April Bob took FINGERS back to Cal Poly to make another bid for the Bar Chief Perpetual Trophy. Sure enough, the team won it for the second consecutive year. Bob was just beginning to cut on FINGERS, and they were enroute from a cutting at

Cal Poly, heading north to the Cooley ranch in Petaluma when the accident occurred. FINGERS spent his last day in front of a cow—doing what he did best.

The Cooleys have felt his going as they would that of a family member. Bob's father had ridden FINGERS on many of the annual week-long trail rides hosted by the Sonoma County Trailblazers each summer. Mrs. Cooley helped groom and feed him whenever he was home in their barn during the five years they owned him; his sisters and brother admired and loved Bob's teammate FINGERS, as well.

Bob, himself, says of the horse he rode nearly every day for five years, "You could put anyone from Grandpa to Grandma to a little baby on him—that's how dependable he was." With a little coaxing, Bob continues on, sad—and proud. "He was the most dependable cow horse. You could get in almost any position on him and he'd still work a cow. He was always smooth and steady and up to a lot of work. He won me a belt buckle every year, and two in 1975 and 1976. FING was my buddy. We'll never own another horse as good as him."

As Bob said many times over the years, FINGER ROCK NORTON may have been a hard luck horse, but he was a champ at heart. All who knew him agree. That is FINGER's eulogy.

*Bob Cooley riding FINGERS at the 1977 Memorial Day Weekend cutting at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo: the last time FINGERS worked a cow.*

