

How Air Travel Affected Cowboys Rodeo Attendance

By Cindy Lea Bahe

Tibbs and other rodeo greats competed in many rodeos across the country and the world. They soon learned travelling by car across the United States was time consuming and as early as 1940, Tibbs and the other cowboys utilized air travel which allowed them to attend key events.

Other cowboys jumped on the air travel idea for like reasons. Convenience led to tragedy in 1998 when four cowboys were on their way to the Grand National Rodeos in San Francisco. The private plane crashed and five were injured including South Dakota's world champion bareback riders, Marvin and Mark Garrett, nationally ranked bull rider, Thad Bothwell, one Texan cowboy and the pilot Johnny Morris. Their injuries weren't their only immediate danger they were facing and one cowboy took the bull by the horn so to speak. As the plane was on fire, Mark pulled the other three cowboys and pilot from the burning wreckage. Unfortunately, Morris later died from his injuries but had it not been for Mark's heroic efforts, the other cowboys may not have survived.

This is one of many stories will find in our Hall of Champions as well as photos, buckles, rings and spurs. When the Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center was being built, Casey Tibbs wanted it to honor all South Dakota rodeo greats - past, present and future. Large, lifelike drawings line one of the hallways and visitors can watch interviews and videos of famous rides of 18 World Champions from our great state including: Mattie Goff Newcombe, Casey Tibbs, Paul Tierney, Marvin Garrett, Billy Etbauer, Tom Reeves, Jerry Norton, Earl Thode, Jack Buschbom, Clint Johnson, Troy Pruitt, Mark Garrett, Jeffery Willert, Pee Wee Morrie, Alvin Nelson, Ote Berry, Robert Etbauer, Frank Thompson and Chad Ferley.

Decade after decade our state continues to be represented by the most competitive cowboys in the country.

Photo caption:

Casey Tibbs, front row and second from the left called this plane a bamboo bomber. By utilizing air travel, Casey and the other cowboys could attend two rodeos in one day.