

Davis, Jerome Carson ^[1]

Jerome Davis, North Carolina's First World Champion Bull Rider

1972 -

by Rocky Rutherford

*Cowboys called him the Iron Man back in his day,
'Cause he'd rode in 'em all — Calgary to the San Francisco Bay...*

On March 14, 1998, at the Tuff Hedeman Championship Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas, the 1995 Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) Bull Riding Champion was cut down in his prime, paralyzed from the chest down. The bull, Knock 'em Out John, had done his job. As he had done so many times before, Davis had to "cowboy up" again and begin the long and difficult trail home to North Carolina.



Jerome Davis

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"I wanna be a bull rider," said the young Davis many years before. Nothing unusual about the statement, perhaps, except maybe that this youngster was not from out West. His family's ranch was solidly in the East, in Archdale, North Carolina. Not only did Davis become a bull rider, but a world champion. One who so dominated the sport, in fact, that Jerome Davis put the Tar Heel state on the rodeo and bull riding map. While not the first Eastern rodeo cowboy, his efforts brought national attention to North Carolina's contribution to rodeo and bull riding. In his easy-going way, Davis made big-time bull riding look effortless.

Jerome Carson Davis was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on August 10, 1972, while his father was serving in the military. Six months later, the family returned home to Archdale, where the future cowboy champion would grow up working the family ranch.

He came out of the chute on his first bull when he was eleven, didn't stay on long, but remained bound and determined to "be a bull rider." On his fourth ride out, Davis got the whistle (he remained on the bull for the required 8 seconds). From that moment on, bull riding was his passion and his life. He took all the bumps, breaks, and bruises that went along with it, winning his first event as a freshman in high school.

In 1988, Davis rode in the National High School Finals in Pueblo, Colorado. He was named the North Carolina State High School Bull Riding Champion in 1990, drawing five bulls in the championship buck off and riding them all.

Two short years later as a freshman at Odessa Junior College, the North Carolina cowboy won the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association's Bull Riding Championship. This was exactly the catalyst he needed to take himself to the next level. That year, he joined the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), a

BULL-RIDING LINGO

EVENT. A rodeo has various types of events: roping, barrel racing, bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, etc. Each was referred to as an "event" until the PBR and other bucking bull outfits reorganized the field to focus specifically on bull riding, when the term "event" replaced "rodeo" to describe an entire bull-riding program.

RIDE. The time spent on the back of a horse or bull in competition. On a good day a cowboy might have a "good ride"; on a bad day, a "bad ride"; and on a really bad day, a "dog." An old song by Rod Hart, "Rodeo Man," says, in part: "I picked up 35 bucks in Reno, I couldn't get a decent ride / But I'll do alright in the Frontier Days if all the good bulls don't die." To a rider, a "good bull" is mean, old, nasty, and rank. But, no matter, a cowboy would rather ride than walk.

WIN. When a cowboy rides his bulls and puts up better scores than the other riders he wins the event.

PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDERS, INC. (PBR).

The PBR was founded in 1992. At that time, Davis, like many other bull riders, was riding in "events" sanctioned by various bull riding organizations including the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA), Championship Bull Riders, Extreme Bulls, and many other independent rodeo/bull riding producers. From 1992 up until his "wreck" in 1998, Jerome Davis "rode" in 7 events sanctioned by the burgeoning PBR with career earnings of \$424,353. These

dream only a few cowboys experience.

As one of the original 20 cowboy founders of the now prosperous Professional Bull Riders (PBR), Jerome Davis lived by its "simple rule: Place a wiry 150 pound cowboy [Davis was 5'11", 160 pounds, at the time] on the back of a hulking, snorting, temperamental 2,000 pound bull and see if he can ride the beast for an eternal eight seconds..." And, while there might be opportunities for professional cowboys to earn big money, the real rewards come from the belt buckles — the insignia of their sport — and they take great pride in winning each one.

As a pro, each event win added a new buckle to his growing collection; he accepted each with dignity and humility right up to his 1995 World Championship. In 1996, he peaked with 10 wins, including the Southeastern Circuit Bull Riding Championship and the Del Rio Bud Lite Cup Bull Riding Championship. Many of these wins were PBR-sanctioned rides.

He blistered through 1997 with 8 major Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) wins, placing second in earnings for that year (\$117,008). Add that to the \$129,000 he earned on the PBR tour, and you can understand why someone might get on the back of a bull. Davis's career earnings in the PBR stand at \$424,353, placing him 56th on the PBR All Time Money Earners' list. All this in six years, and before his 26th birthday.

Davis ripped into 1998 at his peak and was elected to the Professional Bull Riders Ring of Honor — the greatest feat a professional bull rider can achieve — and a humbling accomplishment for this Carolina cowboy. He stands tall with some of the greatest bull-riding cowboys ever: Jim Shoulders, Adriano Moraes, Justin McBride, J. W. Hart, and others, who "share a common bond of not only courage, strength and victory, but also honor."

That year — 1998 — was monumental for the great heights to which Davis soared, and the fall that ended his ride. "There ain't never been a bull that ain't been rode and there ain't never been a cowboy who ain't been thowed," is an old cowboy saying Jerome Davis knows well. Since the day of the wreck over a decade ago, he continues from a wheelchair — or a bobcat seat or a desk — working long days to keep his bucking bull and rodeo business up and running.

And, he gives back. These days, family is what the Davis Ranch in Archdale is all about. Each year, the Davis's host a special rodeo for young hopefuls called The Annual He Paid Your Fees Rodeo. It is free; only a donation of canned foods for the needy is asked of the participants. Just like for the pros, buckles and saddles are awarded. The 2009 event garnered over 500 entries from all over the U.S., making it the largest rider-entered rodeo east of the Mississippi.

Alongside Highway 311 in Archdale, North Carolina, an unassuming yet official blue sign simply states "The Jerome C. Davis Highway." An enduring monument to a Carolina cowboy who would simply reply "I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Jerome Davis Professional Career Stats

Career Highlights:

1995. PRCA World Champion Bull Rider

1993-1997.

- Only bull rider in PRCA history to be ranked in the top five each year.
- Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association National Finals Rodeo qualifier
- Career earnings in PBR and PRCA exceed \$1,000,000

1994-1997. PBR National Finals qualifier

1995.

- World Champion Bull Rider (PRCA)
- PRCA season earnings - \$135,280

1996.

- Southeastern Circuit Bull Riding Championship (PRCA) Dixie National Rodeo (Jackson, MI)
- Bull Riding Co-Champion (PRCA) La Fiesta de los Vaqueros (Tucson, AZ)
- Bull Riding Champion (PRCA) Greeley, CO.
- Independence Stampede Bull Riding Champion (PRCA)

figures represent his overall performance in PBR events.

POINTS & SCORING. A bull ride is scored from 0 to 100 points on the performance: up to 50 for the bull's and up to 50 for the cowboy's. Add those two together, and you've got the rider's total score. For example, if a cowboy's ride is awarded 45 points by the judge, and the bull's 40, the total score for that ride is 85. To maintain this level over 17 rides as Davis did (his average was 85.32), is a bull of an entirely different color.

WRECK. A dangerous, sometimes life-threatening situation that occurs while riding a horse or bull. Riding is a dangerous sport and accidents happen. Even cowboys can get hurt, or worse.

QUALIFIED RIDE. If a cowboy comes out of the chute, does not commit a violation, and stays on for 8 seconds, he's got a qualified ride and the judges can award a score. Davis proved himself a real cowboy with 17 outs and 14 qualified rides, which means he was only bucked off 3 times.

PERCENTAGE. If a cowboy comes out of the chute riding "Dy No Myte," or any other bucking bull, 17 times and gets 14 qualified rides it means that 83.35 percent of his rides are successful.

- Coca-Cola™ Pro-Rodeo Winner's Circle Bull Riding Champion (PRCA)
- PRCA season earnings - \$111,212
- Ranked third in PRCA
- Highest money winner in Professional Bull Riders (PBR) with \$206,111
- Guthrie, OK, Bud Lite Cup Bull Riding Champion (PBR)
- Del Rio, TX, Bud Lite Cup Bull Riding Champion (PBR)

1997.

- Reserve World Champion (PRCA) Salinas, CA
- Rodeo Bull Riding Champion (PRCA) Casper, WY
- Rodeo Bull Riding Champion (PRCA) Pasco, WA
- Last Chance Bull Riding Champion (PRCA)
- PRCA season earnings (before National Finals Rodeo) - \$58,444
- Nashville Bud Lite Cup Rodeo Bull Riding Champion (PBR)
- Winner of the Copenhagen Bull Riders 90-point Club, posting the most 90-point rides in PBR
- PBR Season earnings exceed \$129,000

1998.

- Elected to PBR Ring of Honor
- Leading in the PBR at the time of injury

Memberships

1992 -. Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association

1993-. Professional Bull Riders. One of original 18 shareholders PBR Board of Directors.

Though a quiet man, Jerome Davis's record roars.

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Jerome Davis personal website. <http://www.jeromedavis.com> ^[4]

Professional Bull Riders (PBR) website. <https://pbr.com/> ^[5]

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