

PORTRAIT OF THE WEST

Jay Hoggan at the Dudley Ranch in Montana. Words and photo by Cynthia Baldauf.



Mention Jay Hoggan's name and eyes light up and grins appear. Folks gather close to listen. No matter the subject—feeding elk, buckin' hay, rodeo, horses, bulls, cattle, taters, breaking draft horses or cowboy-ing—Jay has been in the thick of it with 100 stories to tell. A legendary cowboy and all-around western wild, he may be best known as a storyteller. A friend of Jay's once said, "If you're from Idaho and don't know who Jay Hoggan is, I'd be downright suspicious you

might not be telling the truth about being from Idaho."

Born and raised near Mud Lake, Jay ran the Red Eye Rodeo Company for years with his family, as a stock contractor traveling all over the West. Always emanating the power of positivity as he goes, Jay points to different friends saying, "Now...there's one cool cat right there!" On a frigid morning at minus 25, he'll say, "Boy, it's a beautiful day, isn't it?" And mean it. As he staggers up out of a massive wreck, he says: "Boy, that's my best team ever!

They ran plumb over me and never put a foot on me. I love those buggers!"

A common theme from Jay is, "It was a real good day." His daughter, Mindy, once reported this phone conversation with her dad. "Went to Island Park to get a bull today. Bull hit my horse and knocked him into the willows. Then, he knocked my horse down. He knocked me down. McCall finally got him roped. We got him loaded in the trailer and out of there." And without missing a beat and completely serious, he added: "We got along really good. It was a real good day."

Longtime friend Shawn Burtenshaw says that most adventures with Jay begin with, "Just bring your saddle." Another cowboy tells a story that involves helping Jay deliver a bull. Jay promised it would only take 30 minutes, but it turned into a 12-hour marathon. It involved roping a bull from the back of a pickup—ripping off both mirrors—the loan of a four-wheeler from an innocent passerby, which resulted in the loss of all four tires on the vehicle during a rollover. The day culminated with the unauthorized use of a sheepherder's horse that had never roped anything—much less a bull. Mission complete.

In addition to cowboying in Idaho and the surrounding states, he's been a contracted elk feeder for the last 13 winters. Assigned to care for thousands of elk in the Gros Ventre area outside of Kelly, Wyo., each winter results in unlimited stories with many friends visiting on the weekends. Spending the night outside at 20 below even got a story in the Jackson Hole newspaper. Rest assured, there's going to be a horse wreck—it's just a matter of when.

Born without the fear gene, Jay may say, "This is the best team I've had in a while!" But consider asking how many times they've been hooked before you decide to step on the hay sled. ■

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