

## Some people get paid for 'clowning around'



Ben Eby, Mike Ulmer and Jimmy Mack have been clowning around together for six years. Their routines produce a lot of laughs and a lot of sighs of relief from cowboys who would otherwise be running from bulls if the three weren't there to distract the big animals.

Eby, Ulmer and Mack are rodeo clowns and their lives are a combination of make-up, dust and the personalities of bulls.

Bulls have personalities like people, Eby said, and the animals travel the same circuit with the cowboys and the clowns. After a while, the clowns become very familiar with bulls' personalities.

Some bulls are meaner than others and will go after a rider as soon as he's down, Eby said. The clowns have to distract the bull immediately.

How? By swatting him in the face with a red hat. But if some should shake

their heads and that off as pure insanity, Eby says it isn't.

"The closer he is to you, the easier it is to react and move out of the way," Eby said.

However, there is a certain amount of "kamikaze" in the life of every clown because, says Eby, "when a rider is in trouble, you do whatever it takes to get the bull off the man."

However, Eby said, he doesn't have any trouble getting life insurance.

Although all three profess a love affair with the life of a rodeo clown, such a life takes its toll. The three are on the road 12 months a year.

Only Eby is married, and his wife and son were with him in Lincoln during the interview, at an exhibition of the "World's Toughest Rodeo."

Eby is the "old man" of the trio, having been a rodeo clown for 14 years. The U.S. Marines had a rodeo team and his friends talked him into getting involved when he was in the service.

When he was discharged, he turned professional and has been a year-round, full-time clown ever since.

Ulmer said he has been clowning for eight years.

"There is a lot more to rodeo than clowning and distracting the bull away from the rider," Ulmer said.

"You have to aware of whether a rider is right-handed or left-handed because it will determine which way he will fall."

Ulmer said when a rider gets into trouble each clown has to react instantly.

Having been involved in rodeo competition all his life, Ulmer said he first tried clowning at the age of 19 when a clown failed to show up for a junior rodeo he was entered in.

Jimmy Mack said he fell in love with the sport six years ago. He has been involved in rodeos since he entered one in Chicago at the age of 12.

Mack said he likes the independence he has with the job and couldn't picture doing anything else.

He said it is important to "read the bull" and know what position a partner is in.

"There can be no showing off. You have to treat it as a job," Mack said.

"A couple of bulls know which side the cowboy will fall and will be right on top of him. So you have to be right there."



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