



Brian Myrick /
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Rodeo pickup man Gary Rempel works with his horse, Rainbow, outside the Ellensburg Rodeo Arena, Thursday.

REMPEL

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A pickup man's job is to get the cowboy off the bareback bronc or saddle bronc as soon as it is done bucking, assuming the rider is still on the horse.

The idea is to protect the cowboy and take care

of the livestock, Rempel said. Bareback riding can be particularly dangerous. If the cowboy gets bucked off on the wrong side of the horse, his hand can get caught in the rawhide handhold of a rigging.

During the bull riding event, the pickup man's job is to get a stubborn bull safely out of the arena.

"You got to be careful," Rempel said.

A few years ago at the Ellensburg Rodeo, Rempel was bucked off his horse when he roped a bull and the rope went under his horse's tail.

"Bucked me off good and proper," Rempel said.

Starting out

Being a pickup man is not an easy thing to break into.

"It's very, very hard to get started," Rempel said. "To get a regular job is not easy unless you become good enough."

Rempel has definitely become good enough, according to those whose opinions matter most — the cowboys he protects.

For the Canadian Finals and the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, pickup men have to apply for the job and the cowboys vote on who they want to work. Rempel has been to the Canadian Finals 12 times and the NFR six times.

"The cowboys know if they get in a jam, he can get there," Jody said.

Being a pickup man isn't cheap, either.

"You have to have a stable full of talented horses," Jody said. A pickup horse needs stamina, speed and toughness, she said, because the bronc could very well be kicking at the pickup horse as it assists the cowboy.

"The pickup horse has to be fearless," Jody said.

A good horse

Rainbow (the name he had when Gary bought him) is such a horse. While Rainbow started off with an attitude, he settled down after about five years.

"I was picking up off of him that next spring," Gary said, meaning Rainbow went to work as a pickup horse.

At 21 years, Rainbow is getting old by working horse standards. In the last couple of years, Gary has noticed that Rainbow doesn't have quite the same pep in his step.

"My theory on these older horses ... they go to heck in a hurry (if you don't keep them in shape)," Gary said.

"He's still the best horse I got."

Gary said at 59, he's starting to show is age too.