

Wylie Gustafson: Real Life Cowboy Has Something To Yodel About

By Jinny Lowe

Dusty Washington - Whether he's ridin', ropin', lopin' or laughin', Wylie Gustafson lives the life he loves and is a happy man.



On their Cross Three Ranch outside of the town of Dusty in the rolling Palouse country of Eastern Washington, Wylie and his wife Kim raise and train Quarter Horses for roping, cutting and ranch work. In a country where the weather can be as unpredictable as, well, the weather, the Gustafsons can retire to the confines of the spacious new Gustafson indoor arena for riding and training.

In a "which-came-first" the cowboy or the yodel scenario, Wylie credits his love of western music to his dad, who taught this lanky son some of the old cowboy standards as they rode and cowboied the "hi-lines" of northwest Montana. Wylie sets the tales of his time in the saddle to music. "Riding the Hi-Line," "Whoop Up Trail" and "When I'm Ridin' I'm Right" are just a few of the songs he has penned about his passion for the cowboy life and his faithful equine companions.

Wylie and his band the Wild West have taken these good "new" cowboy songs and a lot of the old favorite standards around the country, playing at venues as far away from Dusty as the Grand Ol' Opry in Nashville and the Kennedy Center in Washington DC and any place the "West" lives. They are crowd-pleasers at concerts and dances.

But it wasn't always so. There was a time when a cowboy singer/yodeler wasn't much in demand. In fact, Wylie confessed his first paid performance was in a rock and roll band during his high school days in Conrad Montana. He played similiar gigs around the Northwest, luckily meeting his partner in life, Kim, at a show in Spokane Washington.

in the eighties, the Gustafsons moved to Los Angeles where Wylie pursued his music. That's when the award winning yodeler put some serious effort to his craft. Yodeling was a rarity

back in the mid-eighties and nobody in Southern California seemed to remember the glory days of yodelin' cowboys and Western music. His unique style was born and he developed it further by collecting old yodeling tapes and records and imitating the yodelers of old Westerns and some more recent stadard bearers like Montana Slim and Elton Britt..

Wylie has set his biography to swingtime in the "Yodelin' Fool" - a tongue-in-cheek ditty describing how a small town fella makes good with his off-beat God-given talent and a little bit of luck. As an addendum, a well-placed "Ya-hoo!!" in the high-tech world did make for some interesting legal matters and developed into a nice monetary settlement that went back into his horse operation and the afore mentioned arena.

Today, Wylie and his band the Wild West are a favorite among Western music fans. They have produced eleven CDs with a twelfth to be recorded later this spring in Nashville, produced by John Carter Cash.

Wylie has been named top yodeler in recent years with the AWA (2004 and 2005). Flair for the standard trail song and for high-step-pin' Western swing lent Wylie and the band to be named AWA Group of the Year in 2005.

At present Wylie, either solo or with the band, performs about 100 nights a year, down considerably over the recent past. But as a busy horse rancher, he's got ropes to throw and cutting horse competitions to win.

"When he's Ridin', he's Right... He's a Happy Cowpoke." Wylie with Whiskey, his cutting horse. -->

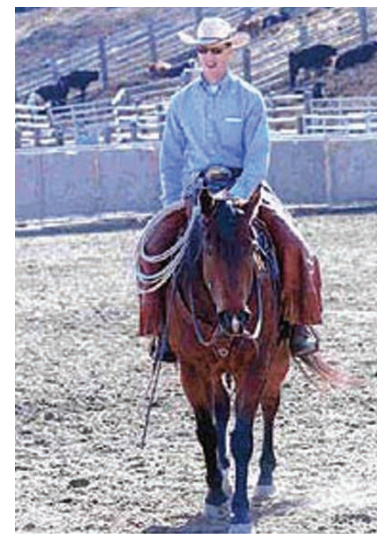
Wylie the Horseman

Meanshile, back at the ranch, Wylie and Kim have a passion for good performance Quarter Horses. They raise and train a small "remuda" of their own and sponsor competitions and clinics at the new arena. Together they are on the road, frequently traveling to and winning Cutting Horse competiions around the West.

Juggling music and ridng can be challenging. "If I do to much of the music, I miss the horses. If I ride all the time, I miss the music," he said. Either way, though, he enjoys what he is doing and is successful at both.

You've heard the expression "don't quit yer day job?" I say, "Wylie, don't quit either one!"

[Photos, except top right, by Bodie Dominguez.]



Ray Doyle has been with Wylie and the Wild West since 1991.



^ Wylie and the Wild West: drummer Josh Dyer, lead guitar and harmony Ray Doyle, Wylie, and "anything with strings" player Scott Wilburn. Left - available for group photos that make the lanky look even lankier is publisher Jinny Lowe.