

With his flamboyant style and unmatched skill as a bronc rider, South Dakota cowboy Casey Tibbs focused national attention on both his sport and his native state.

Casey Duane Tibbs, the youngest of ten children, was born 5 March 1929 in a log cabin on a ranch sixty miles northwest of Fort Pierre, South Dakota. He began breaking horses at the age of ten and by age twenty was already a top rodeo cowboy. In 1949, he became the youngest contender to win the world saddle-bronc championship from the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. His record of six world championships, achieved over the next ten years, still stands today. Tibbs also won all-around cowboy titles in both 1951 and 1959.

Tibbs's riding and his hard-living style catapulted him to national fame. He was the subject of the cover story of the 22 October 1951 issue of *Life* magazine. As spokesman for Lee Rider and Wrangler jeans, he was among the first sports celebrities to give product endorsements. With his access to the national media, he helped to attract more prize money to the sport of rodeo, and he worked to establish the National Finals Rodeo competition.

Upon retiring from competition in the 1960s, Tibbs began a career in Hollywood, promoting the Charlie Daniels and Willie Nelson bands and working as a movie and television writer, producer, and stunt man. He filmed his 1969 documentary, *Born to Buck*, in South Dakota, and his work helped to focus Hollywood interest on filming in the state. Tibbs also worked to preserve the bucking horse, eventually developing his own herd of three hundred horses on the Lower Brule Indian Reservation.

Tibbs always took an interest in his youngest fans, founding an annual 4-H benefit roundup in Fort Pierre. He was also a self-admitted practical joker with a penchant for flashy western clothes and lavender Cadillacs.

Tibbs died of cancer 28 January 1990 in Ramona, California, and was buried in Scotty Philip Cemetery near Fort Pierre. A bronze likeness of him astride a bucking horse resides in the Pro-Rodeo Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the Casey Tibbs South Dakota Rodeo Center in Fort Pierre houses his memorabilia.

by Mary M. Collins

## Dakota Images



Casey Tibbs

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