



## LES VOGT

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Many in the reined cow horse world have been influenced by two-time NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Champion Les Vogt, but Vogt remembers being inspired by Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and Lash Laroo. As a child, he would watch their movies and then, in his words, “go jump on poor old Sweetheart and run that mare, bareback, up and down these mile long canal banks as fast as she would run yelling ‘Hi Ho Silver!’”

Clearly, Vogt knew he wanted a horse career from a young age, and by the time he was nine, he was making money. “The neighbor gave me fifty bucks to start the Shetland pony. But I liked the taste of it at the time.”

You might say the horse business was in his blood. His roots go back to his horse trading grandfather Chet Vogt.

Early on, with a horse his father had purchased for him, Les and friend Leon Harrell were off to the Cow Palace. Les remembers, “We had one day of formal training. I had no idea what was in store for me but I had prepared by dressing. Leon had bought hats with 4” crowns and 6” brims; blue suede boots that would surely make us cowboys with sixteen inch tops and needle point toes and zippers up the sides and blue suede.”

Young Vogt also had a unique approach to the mechanics of showing. “I just went into the arena and ran around. I didn’t do any pattern by their standards.

I just went in and galloped around, stopped and tipped my hat to the judge.”

When he got a “no score”, he went to the judge to ask what was wrong.

When Les was fourteen, he went to work for “Sun A Via” Ranch where he learned from Johnny Lamont. He remembers, “Johnny stood five feet tall and spoke Castilian. I was scared to death of him. He’d say ‘Young man – that is how we are going to do this today.’ and I’d just reply Yes Sir!

“I saw guys with tapaderos and spade bits and two- reined horses and Angora chaps that couldn’t speak English. They didn’t come from Mexico. They had just been on ranches all their lives.”

Les studied the technique of those with more experience and began soaking up knowledge. A turning point in his career came when he gambled against all odds on a dare. At first Les was joking around when he called Fritz Watkin, the owner of King Fritz. “Watkin wanted fifty grand for the horse. I’d heard Ingersoll saying good things about King Fritz so my wife, Coralyn said ‘well why don’t you buy him?’”

Les didn't have the money and didn't expect to be taken seriously, but he called Watkin, agreeing to buy King Fritz and Watkin's Broodmare Band for another \$20,000. "I offered to send \$1000 earnest money to hold the deal together. That's all the money I had and that was for the groceries."

Friend and customer Max Roof helped Les put together a business plan and found a lender. The horse's rise to stardom was so successful the loan was paid off within a year—and the rest of the King Fritz story is legendary.

In January, 1977, tragedy struck. Les remembers, "When King Fritz died it was a dark day around our ranch. I was losing a position in the horse world as well as a really good friend in a horse."

The only bright spot was that Les had a band of 20 plus broodmares in foal to King Fritz. But the tragedy was not over. They contracted a rare strain of rhino, and one at a time, all but two suffered late term abortions.

It was devastating for Vogt. "A few years later the King Fritz horses quit happening and I had to train what people brought me and I haven't really said this too much but I had to start over. And it was the best thing that ever happened to me, having the top end experience and the desire to stay there.

He has 31 championship titles to his name, including two at the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity. He's hosted television programs; his image has graced the cover of countless magazines and he's put on clinics and produced videos for Non Pros and Amateurs. Currently, he travels the world putting on clinics for performance horsemanship and has made a business of designing intricate bits and spurs.

In spite of his tremendous success in the show ring, Les hopes to be remembered for something beyond the horse world. "I think that I would want to be remembered as someone who never wasted a moment. That in the search for excitement, found it, didn't just talk about it."