



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Gerald Roberts (1919-2004)

The Roberts family name and rodeo are nearly synonymous. The Roberts have been involved with rodeo for four generations, beginning with E.C. Roberts on his ranch near Strong City, Kan., a community with a population just under 600. Throughout the years, the Roberts family has continued to impact the sport of rodeo and the business surrounding the sport.



Gerald Roberts was born one of six children to E.C. and Clara Roberts, a ranch family that raised rodeo stock in the 1920s and '30s. At an early age, Gerald embraced the cowboy lifestyle and already wanted to be a rodeo cowboy. By age 13, he was honing his rodeo skills, practicing riding the colts his father purchased. At just 17 years of age, Gerald followed in his older brother and sister's footsteps, joining the professional rodeo circuit.

Roberts began to travel to competitions throughout the country, while his family opened the Flint Hills Rodeo back in Kansas. This would serve as the longest-running rodeo in the state, with the first competition held in 1938. After just a few short years on the circuit, Roberts began winning titles in his sport.

Roberts competed in three rodeo events: bull riding, bareback riding and saddlebronc riding. In 1942, Roberts won his first All-Around World Champion title at the young age of 22. Just six years later, Roberts won his second All-Around World Championship and became the only cowboy to win the title under two different rodeo associations.



Roberts' career in rodeo spanned more than three decades. During this time, he earned 67 belt buckles and 16 trophy saddles. In 1950, Roberts won the North American Calgary All-Around Championship, which he claimed as his greatest success because to win, a competitor had to work every event. His rodeo wins included those at Cheyenne Frontier Days, the San Francisco Cow Palace, Reno and Madison Square Gardens.

In addition to Roberts' success on the rodeo circuit, he became successful in a variety of rodeo-related undertakings away from the competitions. Roberts became the first cowboy to wear and promote Wrangler jeans after being approached by the company for an endorsement deal in 1948. Additionally, he became one of the first cowboys to use airplane travel while competing on the circuit, with friend and fellow competitor Casey Tibbs.



After retiring from rodeo riding, Roberts became a Hollywood stuntman and appeared in a number of western films. In 1964, he moved to Abilene, Kan., and established Chap-Parel Manufacturing Company, producing rodeo gear. Roberts invented a nine-plait bull rope, which soon replaced the five-plait version used by most riders.

Roberts was inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1990; the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1965; the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 1961 as the only rodeo honoree; and the Kansas Cowboy Hall of Fame in 2005. Roberts passed away in 2004.

