

“Ride, Cowboy, Ride”

By M.D. Marks

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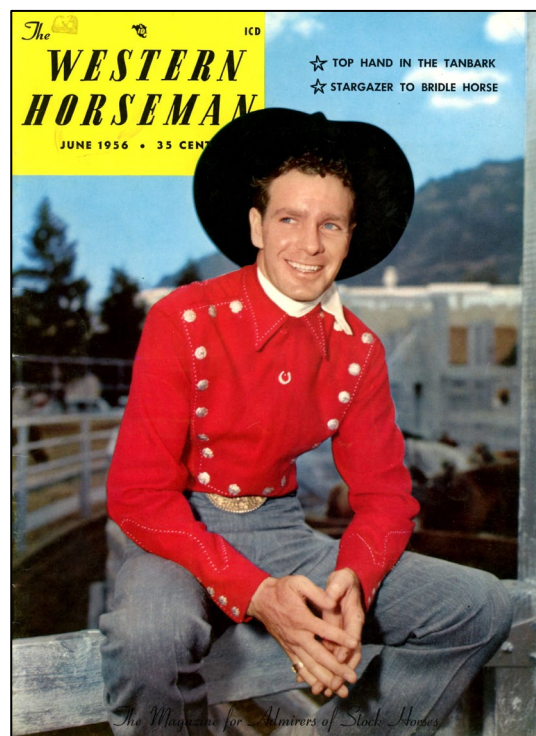
BACK IN THE SPRING of 1997, the Foundation newsletter carried a story written by Jay Fishburn, a jockey and professional horse trainer whom Audie considered a good friend. He had some great stories to tell about his days with Audie and he shared this one, too.

“When they [Audie's horses] were racing in Denver, Audie kept a stable of horses there. When the rodeo was in town, Casey Tibbs would be there, too. Casey was World Champion Cowboy, you know. He did more for the rodeo business than anybody. We went to the races every day and the rodeo every night. The three of us became really good friends.

“Audie had some good horses that made him a lot of money—Depth Charge, Quick Tide, Blen Hostess, Mackay Boy ... Audie's horses were in the black, but he had to bet eight races a day. He always bet to win, and I can recall some elaborate parlays. Thousands and thousands of dollars. But money had no

meaning to Audie, you couldn't believe how he could go through money.

“Casey was quite a gambler, himself. Why, Casey could start the morning with \$10,000 and that night not have a quarter. I remember one night at Hollywood Park he lost all his money and borrowed some from Audie. Audie took off and



Casey comes back and says,
'Hey, I let a guy take my car. You
got enough money so we can go
to dinner tonight?'

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Tibbs had a yearning for high living,
and he was forever known as an
unrepentant gambler. In a one week
stretch of dice and poker in Las Vegas,
he gambled away \$40,000, including
oil well shares.

Both Jay Fishburn and Casey Tibbs
remained close to Audie. Both were
there for him when Audie put together
his last film, "A Time for Dying". But
besides the whole racetrack thing, just
what drew the war-hero-turned-actor
to the curly haired professional rodeo
hand who came from the hills of South
Dakota?

Maybe it was Tibbs' sense of humor.
Audie's was legendary for its
uniqueness. Here's an example of
Tibbs' as it was featured in the
"Legends of Rodeo" of Western
Horseman's "Legends" series.

"On a charter flight out of
Montana bound for Reno,
[fellow competitor Harry]
Tompkins, who'd stayed up late
the night before, confessed to
Tibbs that he didn't feel well.
Tibbs told him that he had some
airsickness pills, which he
offered to Tompkins as the
plane took off.

**Ranch born...
rodeo bred**



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¹ Audie Murphy Research Foundation Newsletter, Volume 2, Spring 1997; page 1
(see https://www.audiemurphy.com/amrf/amrf_news2.pdf)



Casey Tibbs with Audie Murphy and Guy Mitchell. Good friend Casey Tibbs appears to be telling something amusing to both Audie Murphy and the co-star of their TV series *Whispering Smith* in this photo.

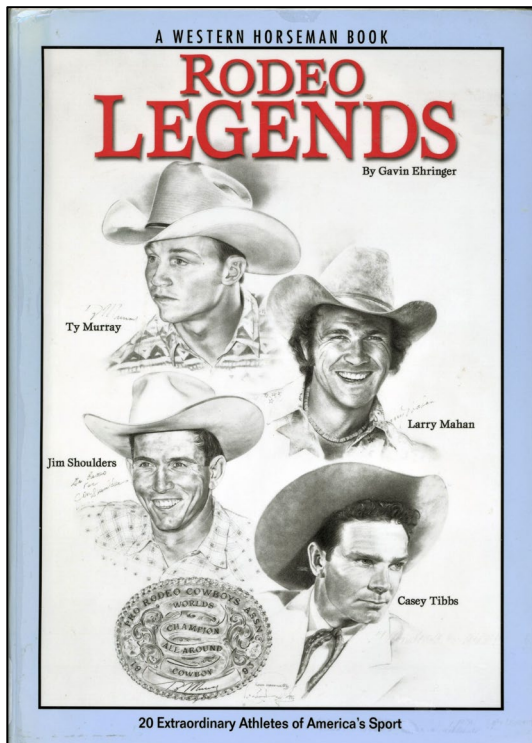
“I asked for one. He told me I needed two. Well, they turned out to be laxatives. For the whole flight, I had to go to the bathroom in a paper sack,” said Tompkins, who was hesitant to fly with Tibbs from that day onward.

Tibbs was indeed a spark plug.

“If you were standing by him, he'd throw a firecracker at your feet. With Casey, there was never a dull moment,” said Tompkins.”²

In an interview with Tibbs, conducted by his friend, Rusty Richards, Casey told of the day he met Audie Murphy for the first time in a steam room at

² Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.



Front cover of RODEO LEGENDS. This publication provides a close look at many great rodeo stars to include Casey Tibbs.

Universal Studios. This was during a lull in Tibbs's rodeo career, in 1951, when he was working on a picture for Budd Boettcher, called *THE BRONCO BUSTER*, so Tibbs was granted "steam room privileges" in the Studio.

Since everyone was scantily attired, as is the custom in steam rooms, Audie's war wound was very apparent when he stood to walk out. Tibbs noticed that a large portion of Murphy's right buttock area was missing. Tibbs boomed out "Hey Murphy, if you're such a great war hero, how come half

your ass is missing like you was running away?"

An understandable hush hit the room, and everyone was prepared for Audie to go off on the newcomer. But, instead, Murphy burst out laughing and thought it was one of the funniest things he'd ever heard.

"We started running around together, bought some racehorses together, and we dated some of the same women. He'd tell the ladies he was Casey Tibbs, and I'd tell them I was Audie Murphy. Audie and I spent a lot of time together."³

From that moment until Audie's death, Casey and Murphy remained close.

The two "Irish boys" enjoyed a lot of wild times together and had a lot of laughs, but Casey also knew the soft side of Audie. In the same interview, Tibbs told Rusty Richards ...

"Little things would bother Audie, though, like the time he backed out of the driveway and ran over a kitten. It just tore him up.

"He got about half hot at me, once, because I was invited to the governor's one-shot antelope hunt, and I wanted him to go with me. But [Audie]

³ Rusty Richards was a good friend of Casey Tibbs often conducting taped interviews with the rodeo star. In the late 1990's Larryann Willis of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation interviewed Mr. Richards who allowed Ms. Willis to listen to and make copies of the tapes.



Ride 'em cowboy! Casey Tibbs shows how to “sit a horse” displaying great control and form in while riding Old Grey Mare in the early 1950's. Photo Source: Capital Journal (Pierre, South Dakota) https://www.capjournal.com/news/casey-tibbs-daughter/article_61ab08fe-475c-11e7-b56c-7742711a7677.html

refused, answering, ‘I don’t want to kill any animal.’⁴

Tibbs was a bit younger than Murphy and missed the whole World War II event. In 1929, he was the tenth child born to ranchers John and Florence Tibbs, on their ranch near Fort Pierre, South Dakota. His Irish forefathers

were some of the early pioneers who came west, seeking better opportunities.

Casey learned to sit a horse⁵ early in life. Not necessarily by choice, but by necessity. He was five miles from the one room schoolhouse on the Dakota plains. Some mornings, he would go

⁴ Rusty Richards’ taped interviews.

⁵ According to Google, the expression means much more than to 'sit upon a horse': it means to adopt and maintain a correct posture and fluidity of motion while riding a horse. It is usually encountered with a qualification, as: She sits a horse very well, very well indeed.



A boys' day out. Terry Murphy and James Murphy sit with rodeo legend Casey Tibbs, their father Audie Murphy, and actor Guv Mitchell.

pick out an unbroken horse from the herd his dad kept, at times well over 1,000 head, and ride the bronc to school. He would have to start out a bit early, because he never knew which direction it was going to take in the beginning. Tibbs was breaking horses for a living by age 10 and at 14 he had launched his rodeo career.

As a kid, Tibbs also was drawn to boxing, with dreams of becoming a prizefighter. He installed his own "equipment" in his dad's barn. Casey commented in the "Legends" article that he would get his own chores done and then do his brother's, too. It was the only way he could get his brother to put on the gloves and go a few rounds with him. It turned out to be a good investment, since Casey felt the practice helped a lot later on when he

got into street fights with the other cowboys.

When Casey hit age 13, he had finished eighth grade. He walked away from schooling and headed for the rodeo circuit. He got turned down by the rodeo bosses because of his young age and he headed back to the ranch for another year. By the time he hit age 15, he was an accomplished bronc rider.

Casey's reputation as a bronc rider grew among the established rodeo cowboys, as well as that of his sense of humor. The others who did not share that style of humor, as well as those who put high regard on their own personal safety learned to stay clear of the curly haired Irish kid.

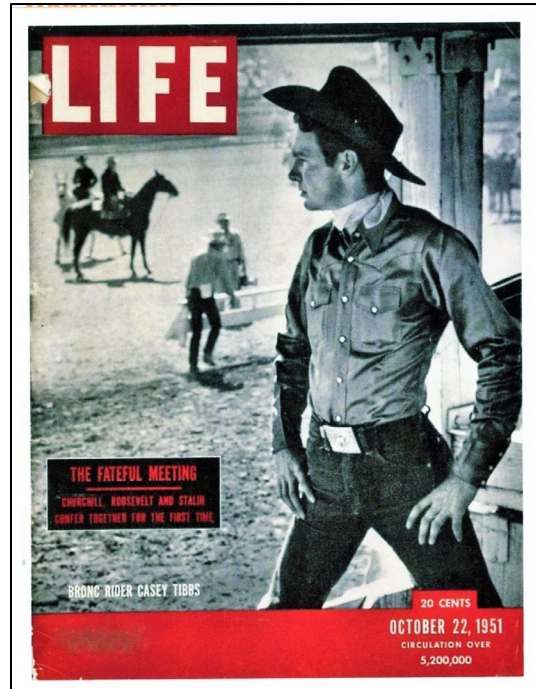
At age 17, Tibbs was competing full-time in the Rodeo Cowboys Association, later known as the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), and in his first year, wound up 5th in the saddle bronc standings. The next year, after his father's death, Casey hit the circuit with a fresh sense of purpose and won his first saddle bronc riding championship at the age of 19. At the time, he was the youngest world champion in Rodeo Cowboys Association history.

While a lot of professional cowboys are slight built and compact, Casey was tall and slender. He brought a new style to competitive riding. The whole term “made his eight seconds” is the common thought behind the success of a rider, but it is not true. Riders in all rough stock competition, which are those featuring bucking stock, are not only scored on the time element, but their riding style and various other rules. Their feet must be in a certain position when they leave the chutes and the motion, they display during the ride is not only key to their staying on, but how high they score.

If anyone could have been compared to a dancer in rough stock competition, it would be Casey Tibbs. He brought in a new style for bronc riding, one which showed gracefulness and a developed form. It had come naturally to him with all those days on the South Dakota ranches of working broncs for \$5 a head.

In 1951, Tibbs took world titles in bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and the all-around cowboy championship. That year, like his well-known Irish friend, Audie, had done before him, Casey graced the cover of Life Magazine. In 1954, he set an unsurpassed record for winning consecutive saddle bronc world titles with four to his credit.

There were rodeo experts who believed Tibbs could ride as well as he did because of his cat-quick reflexes, extraordinary coordination, and



exquisite sense of timing. These were the same abilities that had often been applied to Audie Murphy.

By this time, with a pocket full of cash winnings, Tibbs was living the good life. This began to draw some criticism from some of the less successful competitors. They resented his lifestyle of Cadillac and Lincoln convertibles and the fact that he could stay in the best hotels while traveling the circuit.

Rodeo champion Jim Shoulders is quoted in the “Legends of Rodeo” as saying, “I’d hear the complaints, and I would say, ‘Look at how the media wants to put him in the paper.’ A lot of

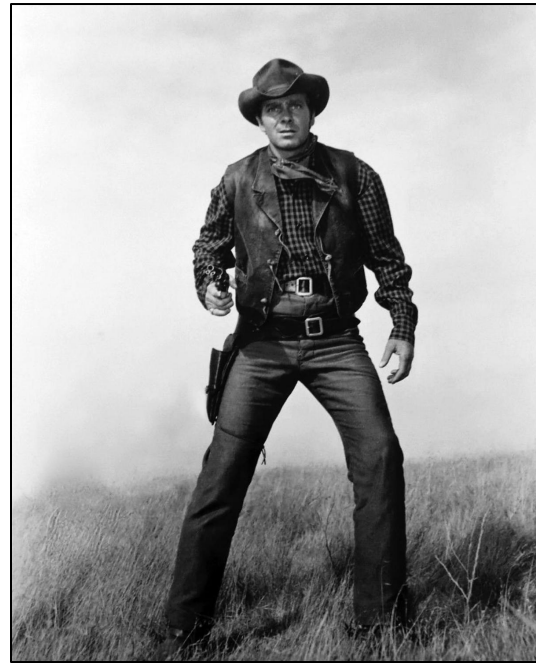
media wouldn't even have talked about rodeo without Casey.”⁶

Between 1949 and 1959, Tibbs won nine championships and was twice World Champion All-Around Cowboy. In 1956, he announced his retirement from full-time competition to look into movies and film parts. In 1957, with no great success in the movie industry, he returned to full-time competition.

In 1959, he earned his sixth and final title as World Champion saddle bronc rider, which set a record for saddle bronc world titles that remained intact through the end of the 20th century. It was a hard road, and somehow, he managed to continue to compete despite the broken bones. A lot of hastily taped up injuries and just plain guts are what got him down that road and to those titles.

In the middle of it all, Tibbs developed a hobby of working with 4-H clubs. He helped establish programs which aided the 4-H programs in South Dakota. Casey started his 4-H project to help underprivileged kids, but eventually opened it up for all kids to participate in.

Eventually, Tibbs ventured into Hollywood, again. He appeared as a stuntman and a second unit director in more than 25 movies and two



A Hollywood gunslinger. Casey Tibbs in a studio photo from the 1958 movie WILD HERITAGE. Tibbs acted and performed film stunt during filming.

television series. He has ridden horses with the likes of Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Ben Johnson, Dale Robertson and, of course, Audie Murphy.

In an article for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, dated August 23, 1975, Casey listed his top movie stars who could really ride.

“Ben Johnson is the best,” he said. “I’d have to rate Joel McCrea second, followed by Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and James Caan. I know

⁶ Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.

Gary Cooper was good, but I didn't see him that much."

Out of that list, it should be pointed out that both Ben Johnson and Dale Robertson were professional cowboys and horse trainers before coming to Hollywood. James Caan actually competed in professional rodeos in between acting jobs, skills he demonstrated in the movie "Comes a Horseman".

In that same article from the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, it was mentioned that Tibbs was in town to promote his Bicentennial Trail Ride, which began at the San Diego Country Estates and wound through the San Vicente Valley, along an old Pony Express trail, across the Cleveland National to Cedar Falls Lake on the Barona Indian Reservation. It was an encore of an earlier ride that former President Gerald Ford's son, Steven had taken Tibbs on.

During the Los Angeles Herald's interview, Casey stuck up for Steve Ford, pointing out that his ability as a horseman was no publicity gimmick. "No, sir," Casey commented in the article. "This young man can do it all. He can work on any man's ranch. He's got the natural ability to be a good cowboy."⁷

This would establish the fact that Steve Ford could function in Tibbs's world, but what made Steve believe that Tibbs could function in the world of a President?

The younger Ford invited Tibbs to come to dinner with him at the White House, at that time the home of Gerald and Betty Ford, his parents. The residence was filled with secret servicemen, and the conversation had turned toward some recent assassination attempts made against the President. Casey took note of that and commented, "I don't know why anybody would want to shoot you, you never done nothing when you was President."

Betty Ford did not appreciate Tibbs's humor, as Audie always had, but fortunately, Gerald Ford did. He really found the comment humorous and had a good laugh. Betty accepted that and was just starting to settle down when Casey decided to demonstrate a lesser known Rodeo custom and promptly ate one of Betty Ford's wine glasses.

It is not known how the Secret Service handled that.

Along with his other endeavors, Tibbs continued to compete in rodeo until 1964, but a broken leg suffered in 1960 ended his abilities to stay on top. It was

⁷ Page, D. (1975, August 23). Tibbs Back On Trail. *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, p. 1. (See the last page in this story for the entire newspaper clipping)

then he decided to make his return to Hollywood. In 1967, Tibbs was offered a part in a television commercial which was going to feature a cowboy. Reminiscent of Murphy's experience with playing a war hero in TO HELL AND BACK, Tibbs was told by the director he "didn't look the part" of a cowboy. They were interested, however, in the use of Tibbs's name.

This Hollywood slight angered Tibbs and he ended up winning the next ten rodeos he entered.⁸

About this same time period, Casey was involved in the production of a documentary film, called BORN TO BUCK. The story was centered around a bucking horse roundup on the Lower Brule Sioux Indian Reservation. While filming, Tibbs nearly drown while trying to swim 400 horses across a flooded river. This would have been another circumstance he could have discussed with Audie who also nearly drown in a lake in Mexico while filming THE UNFORGIVEN for John Huston.

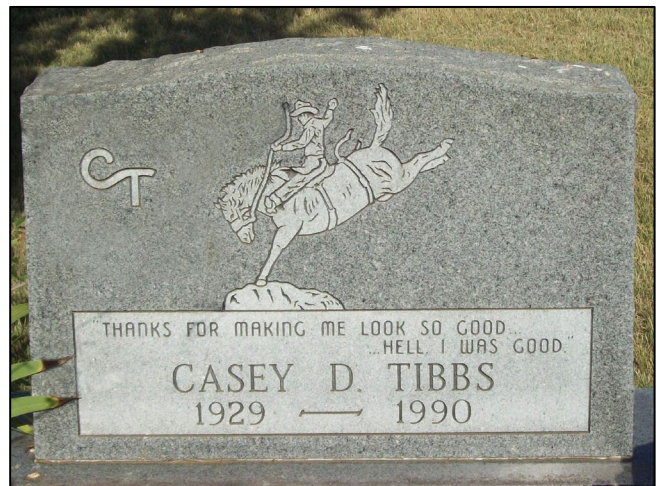
Early in 1989, Tibbs was diagnosed with bone cancer. He was able to be present for the dedication and unveiling of a statue erected in his honor at the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in August of 1989. At the unveiling, the sculpture's creator, Edd Hayes,

revealed a secret. While casting the statue of "The Champ", he had inserted a heart shaped plaque inside the cowboy's chest which read, "Ride, Cowboy, Ride".

Tibbs addressed the crowd by saying, "Thank you all for making me look good." He paused and then said, "Hell, I was good."

Tibbs died five months later at his home in Ramona, California. – M.

– M.D. Marks



Final resting place. Casey Duane Tibbs was interred in the family plot at Scotty Philip Cemetery, Fort Pierre, South Dakota. *Photo by Susan Wiedemer Jones.*

Source: www.findagrave.com/memorial/7076739/casey-tibbs

⁸ Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.

Tibbs Back On Trail

By **DON PAGE**
Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

He's eaten more dust than a cattle driver and been in more saloon fights than John Wayne.

He's been on more horses than Willie Shoemaker and if he was a jockey, his silks would be black and blue.

It's a cliché, but it's true. Casey Tibbs was born to the saddle. He's one of the last of the real cowboys.

Between 1949 and 1959, Tibbs won nine championships and was twice World's Champion All-Around Cowboy. He's won more titles in rodeoing than any man in history.

Casey was breaking horses for a living at age 10 and by the time he was 14, he had launched his rodeo career in his hometown of Ft. Pierre, S.D.

Tibbs is a Hollywood cowboy, too, but you'll never see him carrying a bag over his shoulder. He has been a stuntman and second-unit director in more than 25 movies and two television series.

He's ridden with Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Ben Johnson, Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and most all of the good-riding movie cowboys and he's doubled for everyone from Joan Leslie to Chuck Connors.

At 46-years-old, Casey Tibbs looks and feels fit enough to hit the rodeo circuit again . . . and he probably would if he could get back his

stock, which the Japanese government tied up when he took a rodeo there in 1972.

Meanwhile, Casey Tibbs has become a gentleman cowboy, with neatly-trimmed mustache and nails, conservative western apparel and a minimum of social drinking. And he hasn't been in a saloon fight since the old Hitchin' Post closed down in Burbank years ago.

Today, Casey Tibbs is the (ahem!) Director of Western Activities for the San Diego Country Estates, nestled in the San Vicente Valley, a plush complex which is as far from due ranching as crocheting.

"They pay me a lot of money," he said, "for a guy who's worth two dollars."

We were having brunch at the Valley Tail O' the Cock and Casey was daintily digging into Eggs Benedict — no fries or beans.

Tibbs was in town to promote his Bicentennial Trail Ride, Aug. 30-Sept. 1, which begins at the San Diego Country Estates and winds through the San Vicente Valley along the old Chester Gunn Pony Express Trail, across the Cleveland National Forest to Cedar Falls Lake on the Barona Indian Reservation.

"It's an encore of an earlier trail ride we had with President Ford's son, Steve, as our trail boss," Casey said.

President Ford's son — a good gimmick.

"No, sir," Casey said.

"This young man can do it all. He can work on any man's ranch. Steve came to me without any publicity. He wanted to get away from Washington, D.C. He's got the natural ability to be a good cowboy.

"And you know that Caan is already a good rodeo rider who can ride with anybody."

The upcoming ride is open to cowboys, cowgirls and cow-kids who are experienced riders. There'll be a chuck wagon breakfast on Sunday morning and an evening celebration featuring the Sons of the Pioneers and square dancing and all the fixins.

Tibbs has a large cattle spread adjacent to the Estates and his living is still breaking horses and working the ranch. "I'm on a horse every day," he smiled.

"You know, I watched George Blanda the other day on TV and I thought I was watching a rerun. I couldn't believe a guy his age (47) doing that. But I know I still could rodeo and win! Blanda can still do it because he never let up. I let up once, and that's why I couldn't be as good as I was in my prime."

We couldn't let Casey go without a bit of reminiscing about the bad old days. We got to talking about some of the tough saloons on the rodeo circuit.

"Well," he said, "there's two of 'em that come to mind. There's the 21 Bar in Billings, Mont. If you get tired of fight-

ing inside, you can go out on the street and fight.

"And then there's the Cowboy Bar in my hometown. We call in the 'Bucket O' Blood.' I'll tell you how tough it is. One night some guy got slit from ear to ear by a drunk Indian. Mrs. Sutley from the drug store came over and stopped up his jugular vein, then stitched him up like you'd stitch a quilt. Then she says, 'Give him water and see if he leaks.' The son-of-a-gun lived, too."

Casey then listed his top movie stars who could really ride.

"Ben Johnson is the best," he said. "I'd have to rate Joel McCrea second, followed by Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and James Caan. I know Gary Cooper was good, but I didn't see him that much."

Does he miss the old Hollywood?

"Not a bit."

He paused.

"Except for the old crowd and the saloons."

Los Angeles Herald-Examiner Newspaper Clipping. August 23, 1975 article was cited earlier in this story and is provided here because of the interesting details and insight it offers.