



REBECCA OVERTON

Show me the ropes: When he's not competing or selling horses, Watkins conducts roping clinics at his ranch. The ranch is located south of Bakersfield in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Howard Bias, who let him spend the night and offered him a job at a feed lot so he could get away from his stepfather.

But Sherrie's parents intervened.

"My parents saw something in Dusty," explained Sherrie. "My mother wanted him to finish high school."

Her parents talked with junior rodeo producers Gene and Nita Clark, who offered to let Dusty move in with them until he earned his diploma.

Gene, who was also a rodeo clown, was inducted into the PRCA Hall of Fame in 1997.

After he graduated, Watkins got an apartment for \$95 a month, and began working for Williams full-time as a carpenter. He and Sherrie married in 1981.

Watkins continued to work for Williams and ran the company, a job he held for 22 years. Sherrie worked as a medical assistant, and the couple continued to rodeo. Nikki Jo was born in 1985.

In 1989, the couple managed to buy part of the land where they live today.

"We were a little rodeo family," Sherrie recalled.

"Dusty didn't set out to be a horse trainer. We were just a young married couple who were thrilled to have a house and a barn on 21/2 acres.

"Eventually, we added an arena because Dusty liked to rope. Then people started asking him to ride their horses, and he began training horses for our neighbors.