



**All in the family:** The family business enables Watkins, Sherrie and Nikki Jo to work and play together. Bostons Risky Bez, shown here, is the ranch's stallion.

"If someone is looking for a Paint rope horse, they usually call Dusty," Sherrie noted.

Dusty isn't a man who seeks the limelight. And he quickly acknowledges that his wife is the biggest secret of his success.

"I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for Sherrie," he said.

"She is my best promoter. She writes letters and does things that wouldn't occur to me to help our business."

Watkins horses have been featured on the cover of roping magazines, and their clients run the gamut, from long-time friends to actor Steven Segal.

"The former owner of a horse I bought used to double for Segal, who was filming a movie in Montana," recalled Dusty. "Segal needed a horse to rope off, so he called me and asked me to deliver a Paint to Montana."

In May, Watkins was invited to be a celebrity pro instructor on the prestigious Los Ranchero Vistadores trail ride, which has been called the largest riding group of its kind in the world. The 800-member group has included such notables as President Ronald Reagan.

### "Dusty duty"

But Watkins is equally comfortable with the children of friends and

neighbors back home, who are sent to the ranch to help. Some have gotten into trouble at home or at school.

"The kids call working at the ranch 'pulling Dusty duty,'" explained Sherrie. "At first, they are reluctant to come here. They know they are in for a hard day's work without any sympathy from Dusty."

"Their parents know that, too. Dusty doesn't accept excuses, and the kids accept that or they can leave. But for some reason, they come back. They like it."

"I think kids start to earn respect for themselves when they have accomplished a hard day's work. Their negative attitude becomes positive. Many of the kids who have worked here have become competitive ropers."

Dusty believes people can overcome the hard knocks that life sometimes delivers.

"Just because you didn't have the best childhood doesn't mean you can't turn out OK," he said.

Watkins has refused payment offered from parents for the time their children spend at his ranch, and has declined suggestions that he start a youth program.

"If you can help a kid, that is pay enough," he said.

Nikki Jo admires her father, with whom she teamed at the 2001 American Cowboy Team Roping Association Finals. With Watkins as her heading partner, Nikki Jo placed eighth out of more than 700 teams.

"The reason I have so much love and respect for my dad is because he has come so far from the place he was in as a kid," the pretty brunette noted.

"He could have turned out differently, but he didn't."

Dusty feels indebted to his horses for the way his life has turned out. He has turned down several lucrative offers to buy his black-and-white geldings.

"Someone wanted to buy Zig at the BFI, but I couldn't do it," he explained. "We figured the money would be gone one day, and we would regret losing him."

"Zig made my career. He and Lad are special. I can't sell my partners." 