

A Barrel of Laughs

Longview, TX – Almost forty years ago, Rudy Burns was riding a bull at a Mississippi rodeo when he saw the event’s managers pacing nervously. The rodeo clown, they told him after he’d been bucked, hadn’t shown up.

Burns, a native of Smithdale, Miss., covered for the clown that day and now performs at more than 120 events a year as a clown and barrel-man. “I realized that I would make a much better clown than I did a cowboy,” Burns said. “I was the class clown all my life. I was always playing jokes.”

Now 61, Burns will be entertaining the crowd at the Longview PRCA Rodeo, April 15th & 16th by telling jokes about the president, kidding with the audience members, and curling into an aluminum barrel while a bull is set loose. “Everyone likes to see an old guy in a barrel getting knocked around,” he said.



But 30 years ago, Burns nearly lost his life in the barrel. A bull’s horn penetrated the aluminum and tore through his cheek, taking the top row of Burns’ teeth with it. “I was eating Jell-O for a month,” he said, smiling wide to reveal several fake teeth. The incident didn’t deter Burns from getting back in the barrel.

In the last 10 years, he was chosen twice as one of the five best barrel-men in the country, earning him a trip to Las Vegas and an engraved belt buckle. Burns acknowledges that he’s getting old for his dangerous job, but he can’t bring himself to quit. “I hope I can do this for 40 more years,” he said.

He has seen the rodeo grow immensely since he started riding bulls as a kid. He’s blown away by the large crowds, sponsorships, and the professionalism of the cowboys. The Longview rodeo, a PRCA sponsored event, is one of his favorites. “It’s great that people get really involved in the Longview PRCA Rodeo” he said.

“If I had a real job I’d be retired by now.”