

Tom McGuane

Possibly more than any other individual, Tom McGuane of McLeod, Montana, has broadened the audience for the sport of cutting. The award-winning novelist and essayist has shared his passion for cutting with millions of readers through his magazine articles and books.

"Tom, in my opinion is a one-man PR machine for the sport of cutting," said Buster Welch, a fellow member of the NCHA Members Hall of Fame.

"He got us in front of an entire different crowd of people with his writing and television appearances."

McGuane grew up in Michigan, but as a teenager in the 1950s, he got a job on a ranch in Wyoming.

"It was a big adventure," he recalled. "From the first week I was in the west, I knew that was where I would spend the rest of my life."

As soon as he finished graduate school at Stanford,



he settled down in Montana. He has juggled ranching and writing ever since. His highly acclaimed novels include *The Sporting Club*, *92 in the Shade*, *Keep the Change*, and *Nothing but Blue Skies*.

"If it weren't for the hard winters up here, I probably wouldn't get any writing done," McGuane said. "When we're working horses and we've got cattle on the range, it's very hard to be indoors, sitting at a desk."

McGuane was an avid roper when he took a cutting-bred mare he owned to a Joe Heim cutting clinic in Montana in 1977.

"I had been a fan of cutting, a guy in the stands watching it, but I had never done it," he said. "I took this little mare to the clinic, and the first cow I cut, I knew it was over for life."

He was so taken with the sport and the complexities between horse and rider that he began to write about it, beginning with "The Life and Hard Times of Chinks Benjibay" for *Equus Magazine*. He also did an article about Welch for *Texas Monthly* and a story about the NCHA Futurity for *Sports Illustrated*.

More stories followed, and many were compiled in his book of essays called *Some Horses*.

That book has been a surprise hit for a writer who has been hailed as one of the leading novelists of his generation.

"There is something to be said about pulling together (a book like *Some Horses*)," McGuane told one literary critic. "These are things that you only do when passion strikes. You sit down and write while it lasts and eventually, in this case many years later, they turn into books."

Film star and director Robert Redford noted, "McGuane characterizes the alliance between humans and horses as a 'burst of poetry.' Tom illuminates that truth beautifully, giving us the gift of his own poetry in the process."

McGuane's enthusiasm for cutting is well known in literary circles, and he has found he has the opportunity to talk about the sport on book tours that take him around the world.

"A huge part of cutting is taking care of horses and conditioning them, feeding them, and so on. In terms of elapsed time, the part of it where you're actually sitting in the saddle working a cow is relatively limited," he said. "I find that to be a great relief and a great alternative to straining my skull trying to think of another narrative scheme." ★