

## Russell Dilday is 2008 World's Greatest Horseman

### Robbie Schroeder gets Reserve Champion.

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On Feb. 24, Russell Dilday of Porterville, Calif., riding his horse, Topsails Rien Maker, finally captured the National Reined Cow Horse Association's World's Greatest Horseman title in Stephenville, Texas. But, the road to the Championship wasn't easy.

The World's Greatest Horseman title is an elite competition that celebrates the early California traditions of highly-trained working cow horses. Riders compete in four different ranch work competitions: reining, steer stopping, roping and cow work. The World's Greatest Horseman title is bestowed upon the horse-and-rider combination that has the highest score at the end of the four events.

After the first two events, it seemed clear that it would come down to two riders: Russell Dilday and Robbie Schroeder.

"I haven't absorbed it yet, Dilday said after his Sunday win. "I keep waiting for them to announce 'we have a review.' "

Having finished as Reserve World's Greatest Horseman twice, Dilday knew he needed to lay it all on the line to win, but it seemed that luck wouldn't be on his side. Drawing up first in the herd work, he only managed to score a 211 — a score that normally wouldn't seem too promising. However, tough cattle made it difficult for any competitor to mark high, and Dilday ended up in fourth place.

"I scored two 211s, and I was bummed about both of them," Dilday noted. "I knew it was time to play catch up."

From the beginning of his reining pattern, it was easy to see that Dilday was not planning on taking it easy. From super fast spins to flawless lead changes, he was clearly out to mark high. A score of 221 put him a few points ahead of Schroeder and another equally talented stallion, Shine By The Bay.

Going into the steer stopping, a little strategy was needed. "I played it safe, but I knew it still had to be good because Robbie was right there with me — and he's a much better roper. Obviously, he won that part, but we did OK," he said.

After the roping, Dilday and Schroeder were tied and it all came down to the cow work, where Dilday drew first. A difficult cow looked like it would put the leader out of the running after another 211 score. "We just didn't have luck," Dilday said. "I thought it would run and it didn't, so I figured we would get beat. But I considered it and thought 'Oh well, second's cool. I've done that before.'"

But, as luck would have it, Schroeder also had a difficult cow, and marked a lower score than Dilday. The competition had come down to 10 finalists, with seven horses left to work after Dilday and Schroeder, so it was possible for another rider to take the lead, but none of the remaining finalists got close.

"All these horses could have legitimately won it," noted Schroeder, who finished Reserve. "But it all came down to luck. I'm very happy for Russell to have won it, finally."

Along with a very impressive title, the World's Greatest Horseman contest also bestowed its champion with a check for \$30,000.

Finishing Reserve and winning a \$22,500 was especially exciting for Schroeder, of Gainesville, Texas. Although he has competed in the event three other times, 2008 is the first time he has made the finals.

Both top finishers agreed that the World's Greatest Horseman is the best western competition for putting horses and riders in real situations. "These horses can go do anything on a ranch that needs to be done," Schroeder said. Dilday was quick to expand on that statement. "This event makes you do everything you would have to be able to do as a cowboy. Frankly, a guy without a rope is just a boy on his horse."

For information on the National Reined Cow Horse Association, call (580) 759-4949 or visit the NRCHA website at [www.nrcha.com](http://www.nrcha.com).