

In the rough-and-tumble world of rodeo, almost everyone has a nickname. Monikers like "Hollywood," "Coach" and "The Slickster" reflect the camaraderie of this colorful sport.

So, it's not surprising that professional roper Dusty Watkins, a 20-year rodeo veteran who has a chuteful of titles to his credit, is called by another name by his friends in the pen.

Since 1992, when the 13-time Bob Fiest Invitational competitor first looped the heels of a cow off a striking black-and-white gelding, Watkins has become known as "Paint Man."

The recognition started with Zigs A Tuned Drum, Watkins' big tobiano gelding, and continued with Drums Classy Lad, "Zig's" full brother who is also a flashy black and white.

A humble man, Watkins credits the Paint Horse breed for his success in roping, and in selling and training horses.

"Paints have been good to me," the Bakersfield, California, heeler said.

"You have to be able to rope well and be a good horseman to excel in this business, but people know me by my Paints."

In fact, Watkins has become so synonymous with colored horses that when, on a rare occasion, an acquaintance sees him riding a solid horse, they are startled. He has noticed potential clients rarely stop to talk business with him when he rides a solid equine, too.

"If people see Dad roping off a different horse at a rodeo, someone always asks if something is wrong," noted Nikki Jo Watkins, Dusty's 16-year-old daughter.

"They ask, 'Where's Paint?'"

Rodeo family

Watkins' accomplishments are a tribute to hard work, determination and overcoming adversity. His close-knit family and their

geldings are major contributors on his playing field.

The fruits of the Watkins family's labor can be seen on five acres in the Old River farming area located south of Bakersfield. Part of the fertile San Joaquin Valley, the irrigated land is as flat and green as the pool tables found in Bakersfield's legendary honky-tonks.

Dusty, his wife, Sherrie, and their daughter, Nikki Jo, live in a comfortable ranch house shaded by giant eucalyptus trees that guard the home from the searing summer sun.

The ranch also contains 35 stalls, a covered arena and an open arena, where Watkins trains horses and conducts roping clinics and lessons.

"Dusty built everything on the ranch," Sherrie explained. "He

welded every joint and put in every post."

West of the ranch, the family leases 26 acres for pasture. The couple also stand Bostons Risky Bez, a 1997 black tobiano stallion sired by RR Riskymastrpiece and out of My Class C Mac (AQHA).

The Watkinses are surrounded by family. Dusty's sister, Rhonda Blythe, and her family live next door. Sherrie's sister, Tami Churchfield, and her husband, Carl, live a quarter-mile down the road, while her parents, Curt and Jo Ann Williams, live 10 miles away in Bakersfield. Dusty's father, Orvel, lives about 25 miles to the west.

At the front of the house is the office of the family business, Dusty Watkins Paint and Quarter Horses. In one corner, a glass-enclosed cabinet that stands from floor to ceiling contains three gleaming trophy saddles, newspaper clippings and several awards.

One wall of the room is covered with photographs and trophy belt buckles, testaments to Watkins' success as a roper. His accomplishments include competing in the 2000 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) Dodge National Finals, and the PRCA Circuit Finals in 2001.

