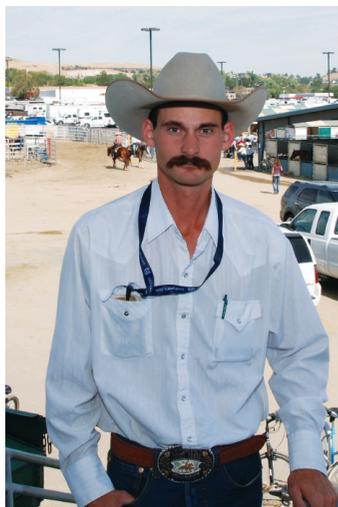


# First-Time Champion

Thanks to a new class, a Nebraska cowboy rides home with two NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Championships. By Sonny Williams



**Matt Koch** —Photo by Sonny Williams  
**(Left) SDP Blue Blood and Matt Koch won the first ever NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Level 1 Open.** —Photo by Primo Morales

Imagine a young cowboy who has ached from throwing loops during the spring gather, sweated his way through the afternoons longtrotting during the hot summer, and endured the harsh winters and wind of the Midwest plains. He's up before the sun, still working after it sets. Now imagine this same cowboy, training a young horse when work on the ranch slows down enough for him to have the chance to, harboring dreams of going to the big cow horse show in Reno, a chance to show his craft, a good horse and a good hand, under the bright lights for the first time.

Such is the real life of 26-year-old cowboy Matt Koch, who has been working nearly three years at the well-known Haythorn Land & Cattle Co. in Ogallala, Neb. At first, it seemed Koch was going to have one horse and one shot at the 2011 National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno, Nev., but thanks to a new Level 1 Open class, Koch was able to better his chances. If he would have been limited to only one horse, he said he would have probably just entered the Limited Open.

"It was a good deal for me cause it cost only half the price as entering the Open, so I could afford to kind of come out here on one of my horses, and the ranch could afford to send me out here on some horses," Koch said. "We had a little extra left over, so we entered a couple hackamore horses, too. If they didn't have Level 1, I probably would have brought out maybe the one horse to show and left the other three at home and only had one chance at it."

Koch ended up winning the Level 1 Open Futurity at the 2011 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity with stallion SDP Blue Blood (Laredo Blue x SDP I Got Good Genes x Dual Rey) with a 641.5 composite score to earn \$5,844. He also placed fifth in the Level 1 Open Futurity on a Haythorn-owned gelding, Shine Your Boots (Shiners Lena Doc x Bar Z Annie x Leo Goldseekers), earning an additional \$2,338.

This was Koch's first time competing at the premier cow horse show, and he was able to get over the first-timer jitters to get SDP Blue Blood shown, whom Koch and the Haythorns purchased at the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Sale last year for \$10,000.

"This is some deal and I was pretty nervous,"

Koch said. "The Haythorns and I are partnered on him [SDP Blue Blood]. We brought him home and I took his shoes off and just went to using him in fall works, outside, and roping and all that. Then I went to Darren Miller's last winter outside of Denver, and he helped me start finessing things, reining on him and stuff like that, then I went back to the Haythorns in the spring and branded on him and kept training whenever I had a chance. He worked out to be a darn nice horse. He does whatever you ask him to."

Koch made good with the extra money he had to spend bringing extra horses and entering another class at the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity. He won the Limited Open Hackamore with his own stallion Above Da Best Tenino (Lena My Way x Tenino Gator Gal x Teninolena Badger) with a 209 in the rein and a 220.5 in the cow work for a total of 429.5 to earn \$1,980.

Koch also brought a third horse to Reno and placed 12th in the Limited Open Hackamore with FF Black Moon (Figure Four Chex x Boon Buttercup x Eddie Eighty), owned by his employer, Haythorn Land & Cattle Co.

Originally from northeast Kansas, Koch didn't become a cowboy in the typical fashion. Though his grandparents and uncles had a farm, his father owned a cabinet shop.

"I had no idea what a lead was until I went to college," Koch said laughing. "I went to Lamar Community College, then they sent me to Lloyd Cox on an internship. I studied horse training and management, rode broncs and team roped."

Koch was a quick study, and when he won the Haythorn Land and Cattle Co. Futurity, he found himself working for one of the top outfits in the country.

"The Haythorns have a deal that if you buy a horse through them, they're eligible for their Futurity, and I'd bought a couple of horses as yearlings, and I brought them back and won their futurity. They said any time I wanted a job I had one," Koch said.

"I was working for Robbie Boyce at the time. I finished up down there that winter and then came up to the Haythorns in the spring, and it went from there. They're a really good outfit." ★