

J.C. Trujillo

When 100 real-life cowboys don skis, chaps and cowboy hats on Jan. 19 for the 25th running of the Cowboy Downhill in Steamboat Springs, Colo., you can thank J.C. Trujillo for the fun. The former bareback-riding world champion, who now runs an outfitting service near Steamboat, is the event's heart and soul.

Born May 10, 1948 (age 50)

Home On The Range "I grew up on a ranch in Arizona. My father was a working cowboy and a rodeo cowboy. When I was 6, I competed in my first rodeo in calf riding. After that, rodeo was in my blood."

Out Of The Chute "In 1975, I was in Denver, Colo., for the National Western Livestock Show and Rodeo. About 30 of us cowboys were invited up to Steamboat to race in the Cowboy Downhill. Billy Kidd and cowboy Larry Mahan had started it the year before just to have some fun. I had never skied before, but I raced in it and somehow finished second."

Enjoying The Ride "I liked skiing so much that I moved to Steamboat in 1976. It's a great Western town. In 1981, the same year I won the world championship in bareback riding, Billy Kidd and Larry Mahan turned the Cowboy Downhill over to me. I've organized the race ever since."

Frontier Daze "The concept of the Cowboy Downhill has always been the same. You ski down through gates and over a big jump. Then you grab a rope, lasso a mountain hostess and saddle a horse. It's a mixture of skiing and cowboy skills. The crowds love it—we'll get 2,000 fans, which is more than some World Cup races."

A Soft Landing "We've never had a serious injury in 25 years of the Cowboy Downhill. Landing on snow is easy compared to landing on the ground when you've been bucked off a horse or a bull."

Ride 'em, Cowboy "In skiing, you have the same freedom as riding a horse. It's also an individual sport like rodeo. It's either you and the horse or you and the mountain." — READE BAILEY

