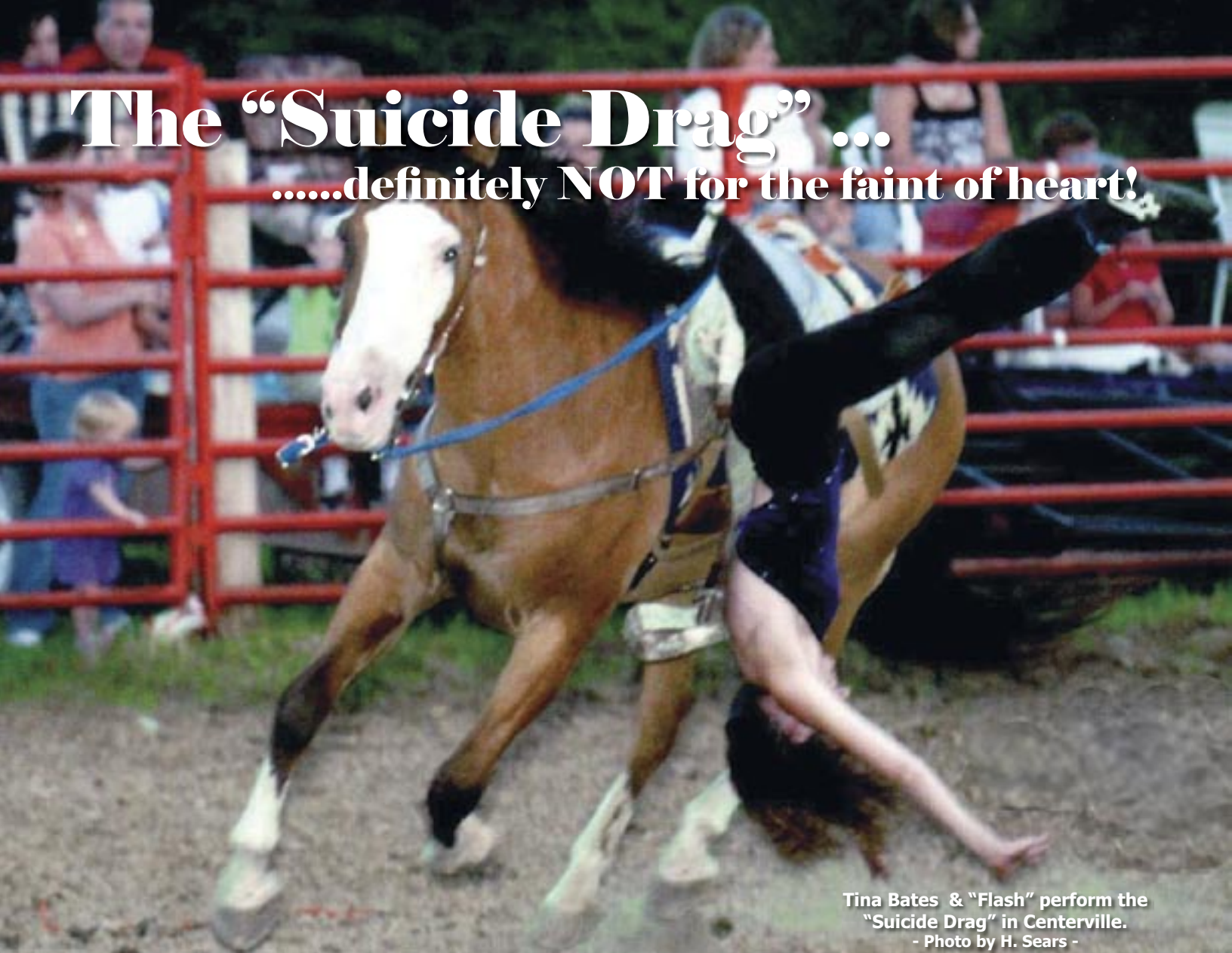


# The “Suicide Drag” ... .....definitely NOT for the faint of heart!



Tina Bates & “Flash” perform the  
“Suicide Drag” in Centerville.  
- Photo by H. Sears -

by Carol Eilers

At some point in our lives, most of us have participated in an activity with the sole purpose of getting an “adrenaline rush.” For one person, it might be bungee jumping or sky diving; for another, it could be smoking a cigarette behind the garage, or riding a bike with no hands. And yet there are some folks who may turn to horses – jumping large obstacles while riding cross-country, or barrel racing at speed, for instance.

For Tina Bates, of Lucas, IA, it was a sport that she had observed at several rodeos while growing up that piqued her interest and stoked her quest for “a rush.” Seeing a trick rider perform the “suicide drag,” she decided it was something she just had to try! To perform the suicide drag, a trick rider puts a strap around her right ankle, turns her toe up, and free-falls backward off the horse. The rider’s head ends up mere inches from the ground and the horse’s feet.

“I have always been one who has pushed the edge when it came to riding,” stated Tina Bates. Early on, High School Rodeo provided  
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her with “the edge,” where she participated in barrels, poles, goat tying, and girl’s cutting. But that wasn’t enough. It was going to be the suicide drag or nothing!

So Tina, who grew up on a farm in Garden Grove, IA, began the process of finding the right horse. Bates was very comfortable around horses and had a lot of experience with them, so had some strong notions about the type of horse for which she was looking. She stated that, “I laugh when someone asks me for how long I have been around horses. I had been riding a horse before I could walk. I was riding in front of my dad working cows when I was three. Horses have always been a part of my life. I was also involved in 4H, FFA, and the local saddle club.” Obviously, Tina knows horses!

As Tina experimented with a few different horses, she concluded that, “The best mounts are old ranch broke geldings that have been there and done that. Right now I am riding a 22-year-old Quarter Horse gelding named “Raiders Flash Dancer,” *Flash* for short. I have a four-year-old gelding that

I just started hauling this past summer named “Duck.” He seems to be taking to it all with a better attitude than some have; so I think he might make a good one.”

When I asked her how difficult it was to train a horse for trick riding, Tina chuckled and said, “**Training** a trick riding horse is the easy part. Finding one that will keep going when you do vaults, or not freak out when you have fire burning above them is what takes time.” Bates was emphatic when talking about trust. “If you can’t trust [your horse], you won’t ever relax doing the tricks and in turn this will make him nervous.” While convincing a horse to run full speed around the arena is normally fairly easy, and teaching him to stop and turn into the fence normally comes easy, it’s the patience and quiet attitude that comes much harder. A trick horse must stand in the corner of the arena and wait for his turn to perform. Once he knows the routine, he tends to anticipate and get anxious in the corner, waiting to make his next lap. “This is where lots of time spent in the practice pen pays

off. In the practice pen you have [the luxury of extra] time to let your horse stand in the corner and calm down before you make the next lap; this tends to help keep their mind at ease when you are performing," states Bates.

According to Bates, the next lesson is a bit more difficult. "Convincing a horse to keep moving when your butt leaves the saddle is not always an easy lesson to teach. Most horses have been trained to stop; so teaching them to go on takes a lot of work. But with the help of a second person with a lounge whip, keeping the horse moving forward while the trick rider gets into the trick, the horse begins to get the idea and things fall into place."

"How dangerous would you rank your sport?" I asked.

"Dangerous - yeah I suppose so, but to me it is just a day's work. I guess I don't look at the fact that one wrong move could put me out of commission. I trust my horse to take care of me, and don't think about the "what ifs." You just can't. When you start over-thinking what you do, it's the time to get out. Doubt brings fear and fear will bring disaster."

When practicing, Bates usually wears jeans, but nothing loose-fitting that could get caught or tangled up. For her footwork, she dons wrestling shoes, which nicely support her ankles, yet still provide flexibility for her feet.

Costumes need to be flashy, and Bates orders most of her costumes from an online dance company, and her Grandma also makes some of her costumes. "The thing to remember is, shirts need to be fastened down, and pant legs tucked into shoes; a shirt over your head during a performance has several disadvantages," stated Tina.

As you can imagine, Tina has had many memorable experiences from her trick riding performances, two of which she shared.

"When I was just getting started, I was performing at a rodeo in Leon, IA, in front of a home crowd. I had grown up at this rodeo, riding calves in Little Britches, and was the Rodeo Queen in 1995.

The first two nights' performances went off without a hitch, but then on the third night, when I did my suicide drag, the strap broke on my saddle. I was halfway around the arena upside down when my equipment failed. Luckily, I was coming around the corner so I was leaning out from my horse, and gracefully landed face first in the sand on the arena floor. Getting up, I heard my dad yelling across the arena, 'Are you hurt?' I was thinking, 'No, I think everything still works.' He continued with, 'Get your butt



Tina Bates, performing in Centerville.  
- Photo by H. Sears -

back on your horse! You got two more laps to make! Yeah I wanted a big rock to crawl under, but like he said, I had two more laps to make. So I ran back to my horse, got on, and finished the show."

"Another incident that comes to mind," said Tina, "occurred just this past summer. I had decided to get my PRCA acts card. In order to do this you have to be inspected and approved by the PRCA. I decided I needed to add a little flash to my act, so I decided to add a flag that had flames shooting out the top of it. I thought it would be cool, but my horse - well; he had his doubts. Of course, this was something I decided to do at the last minute, and didn't have time to practice before I performed the act. Not something I would recommend! It was a little interesting, standing in the corner getting my feet into the straps so I could stand above my horse, and trying to convince him that this flaming flag going up over his head wasn't going to get him. Luckily, it all worked out, thanks to help from a couple friends."

Tina Bates performs at many rodeos and bull buck outs, and most recently has taken up traveling to Renaissance Festivals with the Des Moines Joust team (featured in the fall issue of this magazine!). But her favorite place to perform is at a bull buck out. According to Bates, "The crowds are always fired up and full of energy. A rowdy crowd makes the adrenaline pump, and makes for an exciting performance."

But the excitement doesn't end here! Tina's five-year-old niece, Cheyenne, is "picking up the reins," and has begun performing occasionally with Tina. Here she is (photo at right), performing with Tina at a rodeo during the summer of 2008. "She has been practicing all winter, and will go on the road with me again in 2009," smiled Bates.

Happy Riding, Tina & Cheyenne! You two are definitely **not** "Faint of Heart."



Tina Bates is currently taking bookings for the 2009 season, and would love to visit with you or travel to your event. You can contact her via email, at [batesc29@yahoo.com](mailto:batesc29@yahoo.com), or call her at 641-414-7622. Her website address is [www.trickriderextraordinaire.com](http://www.trickriderextraordinaire.com), where not only can you learn more about Tina and trick riding, but you can also view her new line of jewelry and tack for sale, as well as her mini dachshunds.