

**JANE
SLOVENSKY
NESBITT
1905-1996**



**TRICK
RIDER
PAULINE
NESBITT**

An exciting trick rider, known for her flair and split-second timing, Pauline Nesbitt was one of the most thrilling rodeo performers of her era. She made her own costumes and modeled them in the Sears Roebuck catalog, which placed the image of real cowgirls in homes across America.

She was born Jane Slovensky in August 1905 in Union City, Ohio. Her parents Stephanus Szlovinszky and Maria Kosco were from Slovakia. She and her ten siblings grew up on a ranch in Stanley, Wisconsin. At age thirteen, she first rode a bronc while visiting friends in Gonzales, Texas and from that moment, she was intrigued.

Her career started at seventeen, when she became a lady bronc rider. She switched to trick riding after she watched cowgirl Tad Lucas at a San Antonio, Texas rodeo. Her admiration for Lucas' daring trick riding performances led to a shift in her rodeo career and she, too, flourished as a trick rider.

Barbara "Tad" Lucas began as a bronc rider in 1922, but achieved greater success as a trick rider. Between 1926 and 1933, she won trick-riding titles at Fort Worth, Cheyenne Frontier Days, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago. Her greatest achievements were at Madison Square Garden where she won the 1925, 1926 and 1928-32 trick-riding titles and the 1926 and 1928-32 all-around cowgirl titles.

Pauline's first marriage to Grady Wilson didn't last. On the rodeo circuit, she met rodeo clown Jimmie Nesbitt, whom she married in September 1927. The Nesbitts lived in Fort Worth for a while but eventually bought a Nowata ranch, where they raised cattle and horses. Jimmie convinced her to quit bronc riding and concentrate on trick riding. During rodeo season, their time together was spent on the road in their car, pulling a trailer with Jimmy's mule and Pauline's pinto.

The couple toured major rodeos throughout the 1930s and 1940s. He wowed crowds as the original bullfighting rodeo clown while she thrilled audiences with her horsemanship. Her shoulder stands, under-the-belly stunts and spectacular routines were world-renowned. Pauline performed at all of the top rodeos in America: for Gene Autry at Madison Square Garden and Boston Garden and competitions at Cheyenne, Fort Worth, Kerrville, Tulsa and Denver. She even did a stint with the Ringling Brothers Circus and appeared at some World War II All-Girl Rodeos.

In 1934, Pauline finished fourth in the trick riding at Madison Square Garden. She won her first trick riding championship at the 1937 Fort Worth Rodeo, and successfully defended her title in 1938. That same year Nesbitt became the World Champion Trick and Fancy Rider. She often competed while injured. Possibly her worst injury occurred when she was kicked while going under the horse's belly at an Idaho show. She finished the performance and drove to Colorado with three fractured vertebrae. She buckled herself into a brace and finished the season.

In addition to training all of her own horses, Pauline made her own costumes. Her beauty led her into modeling, where her love for Western fashion was highlighted in several articles. She modeled women's Western wear, along with Tad Lucas and others, for the 1941 Sears Roebuck Catalog.

Pauline stayed involved in the ranch-rodeo life after her career ended in 1948 by ranching and raising cattle and horses until the 1980s. She died in November 1996 at age 91 in Nowata. For her athleticism and horsemanship, and her notable contributions to the sport of rodeo, Nesbitt was inducted into the Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1999 and National Cowgirl Museum's Hall of Fame in 2011.