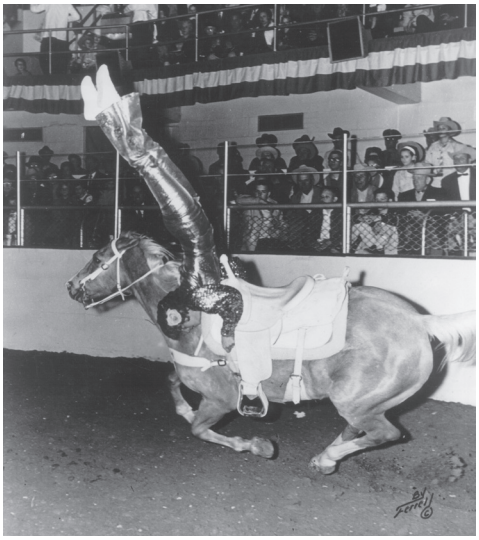
COWGIRL ICONIC





Ferrell Butler Photo
Images courtesy of The Cowgirl

KAREN VOLD

By Diana Vela, Ph.D
National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame

Trick and fancy riding, an extreme sport long before the term existed, found a national audience through Wild West shows, and cowgirls from all backgrounds made the sport their own, refining, popularizing, and creating some of the most recognizable and daring tricks in the discipline.

Karen Womack Vold entered the discipline in the early 1950s as a child, when it had transitioned from a competitive sport to an exhibition sport. She learned a few tricks from a woman who kept a horse at the stable where she grew up, then taught herself by watching trick riders at rodeos, and attempting the same tricks at home (which is probably where the phrase "do not try this at home" originated).

Her father, the professional rodeo clown and successful building contractor Andy Womack, was both supportive and close to his daughter. He told her he would pay for her to take lessons from Dick Griffith, the acclaimed trick rider, if she would just learn the shoulder stand. That was the extent of her father's wishes; Karen wanted to pursue it as a career on the rodeo circuit.

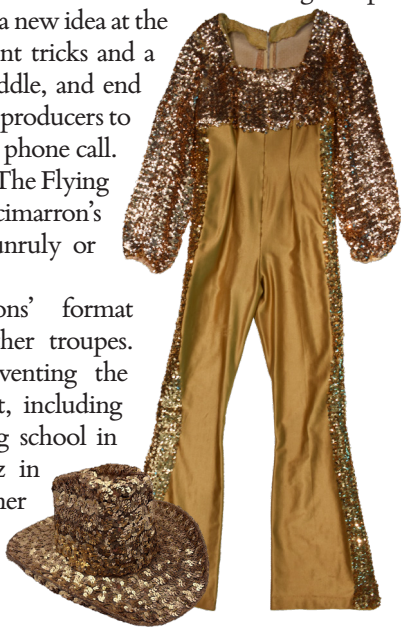
In an oral history conducted for The Cowgirl, Vold remembers many arguments with her father, which all went the same way. He would tell her, "It is not proper for a young single lady to go down the road being a trick rider." Vold would reply, "But why can't you be a nice girl and a trick rider?" Marriage was the rodeo circuit entry price for a young female to satisfy the social mores of the time. She married, and later remarked that had she been able to travel the rodeo circuit single, she would have.

In the late 1950s, newly invented Spandex and Lycra-blend fabrics made one-piece bodysuits the trick riders' choice. Snug-fitting to prevent slippage during high-speed maneuvers, they provided maximum flexibility and were often customized with sequins or rhinestones. Under arena lights, Vold's gold lamé suit, accented with additional gold sequins, transformed her into a shooting star as she raced around the arena atop a galloping horse.

Vold trick rode for 17 years. The shoulder stand, executed in honor of her father, became her signature trick. A swayback gave her legs a hyper-extended look, making her stand distinctive, as seen in the photo above.

Trick riders were typically booked individually, which meant the possibility of four or five riders executing the same tricks at a single event. In 1962, Vold co-founded a trick riding troupe that was a complete show, a new idea at the time. This ensured different tricks and a show with beginning, middle, and end and made it easy for rodeo producers to hire an entire act with one phone call. The group took its name, The Flying Cimarrons, because of cimarron's definition as something unruly or wild.

The Flying Cimarrons' format was later adopted by other troupes. Vold's creativity in reinventing the business side of the sport, including co-founding a trick riding school in 1976 with Linda Scholtz in Colorado, is as much her legacy as the shoulder stand itself.



Karen Vold's gold sequin trickriding performance suit and cowboy hat
National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame Collection

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