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Dodge uses Airdrie horsepower to rewrite record books

CALGARY – The "weight" was well worth it for Randy Dodge.

Dodge, the veteran horse puller from Albany, Ore., has enjoyed a strong friendship with the Soderglen Ranches outfit of Airdrie, Alta., since he began towing to Alberta for the Calgary Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull nearly a decade ago. Sunday night, that friendship paid off in spades – not only giving Dodge memories that will last a lifetime, but also rewriting the event record books as the 2011 Stampede drew to a close.

Dodge had already won Friday's lightweight division and Saturday's middleweight division at the Heavy Horse Pull, sponsored by Soderglen Ranches, UPS, Burnco, and Wrangler. But he was at a distinct disadvantage for Sunday's heavyweight divisional showdown, with his Belgian team of Jack and Michael tipping the scales at only 3,876 pounds, about 1,200 lighter than some of the eight other outfits entered.

The Soderglen team, owned by Stan Grad, kindly put the reins of its two teams – Ben and Roy, weighing in at 5,134 pounds, and Rex and Lane, weighing 4,882 – in Dodge's hands, while Soderglen teamster Nicolas Pouso took over Dodge's pair. And wouldn't you know it – with Dodge driving, and Pouso setting the hook, the Antony Family-supported team of Ben and Roy won the heavyweight belt by pulling a 13,000-pound sled the full 14 feet, earning a winner's cheque of $3,000.

And then, for good measure, they eclipsed the existing heavyweight division weight record of 13,200 pounds by going right back out and performing another full pull at 13,300.

"Stan Grad wanted to give me a hand and have me drive his 'A' team, so I gladly agreed," said Dodge. "This is an amazing feeling. This is great. I didn't think it would ever happen, but it did. That's hard to do, win three (divisions) at Calgary."

"Randy is a top teamster in North America. They don't build 'em any better than Randy. I think the world of him. And I think this is spectacular," said Grad. "(Prior to the Stampede), Randy comes up and helps us work horses, and works his horses at the same time. We've been doing that for quite a number of years.

"Being successful in this game, it's not only the horses. A lot of it is driving. If you don't do everything just right, especially on those last loads . . . the horses are so hot and wired up, if you don't get 'em working together, you're in trouble," added Grad. "It's being smart enough to know when they're ready to go . . . it's all split-second timing."

The nine-team pull had been whittled to just two by the time the sled was loaded to 12,500 pounds. And if not for a great second effort, Ben and Roy would have been forced to take a measured pull at that weight.

But they dug deep and found the few inches required for a full pull. And one round later, at 13,000 pounds, Weinberger's Belgian pair of Uggh and Jesse, supported by the We've Got Pull syndicate, was flagged for a line violation.

"(The sled) was in a bad spot, a loose spot, and in a bit of a hole. It just had to go three, four inches to get it across," said Dodge. "They handled really nice and did a nice job for me."

Weinberger took the reserve champion's prize of $2,500. He also picked up third place, worth $1,500, after his Catalyst-supported pair of Doc and Dan managed a 91-inch pull at 12,000 pounds.

This year's Stampede Heavy Horse Pull, the richest in North America, drew teamsters from as far away as Oregon, Washington, and Saskatchewan, with outfits primarily featuring Belgian and Percheron horsepower.

The teams of the Stampede's heavyweight division tipped the scales at a combined two-horse weight of 3,501 pounds and more.

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