

# 20 NRHA TOP TWENTY

## PROFESSIONALS

BY HEATHER LOVERIDGE

### Mike Davis, Davenport, Iowa

**W**HILE IN HIGH SCHOOL MIKE DAVIS GOT his start in the reining world, working for NRHA Professional and Million Dollar Rider Craig Johnson. After graduation, Davis continued with Johnson, eventually moving with him to Texas. For the next 15 years he continued to learn the sport, adding Doug Milholland and Scott McCutcheon to his list of mentors, spending time training in Italy and eventually returning to his Iowa roots.

In 2007, Davis partnered with one of his clients, Tami Schiltz, and opened V2 Reining Horses, where he trains non pros and open horses.

“Our customers are the greatest customers in the industry,” he said. “I really enjoy the non pro part of my career.”

Davis’s optimism is evident when he talks about his life. Despite having a horse fall with him in early 2009 resulting in a torn rotator cuff and tendon, and then having another horse fall soon after recovering,



breaking his other shoulder in five places, Davis kept going. He had plans to show Wimpys Tonnob, owned by clients David and Joyce Nuernberger.

“I knew I had a good horse,” he said. “Shawn Florida, a good friend of mine, told me to send the horse to him and he’d ride him for me. So I did and he kept him going.”

Davis’s injuries finally healed and he headed to the Futurity. There Davis and Wimpys Tonnob won the level 3 intermediate open, level 2 limited open, and the level 1 open divisions winning over \$80,000 in NRHA earnings.

“He is pretty special, even more so that the Nuernbergers invested in me. They didn’t need another horse, didn’t really want another horse, but they bought into our program, knew we needed better horses and were willing to do it,” he said. “I’ve been very blessed with customers who believe in what we’re doing and believe in what NRHA stands for.” ♦

### Marco Ricotta, Tioga, Texas

**A**S A CHILD GROWING UP IN BIENTINA, ITALY, MARCO RICOTTA had limited exposure to horses. Fortunately, though, his uncle had ranch horses and Ricotta began riding with him, learning how to train. One day, while breaking a colt for a friend, one of Italy’s most well-known farriers noticed Ricotta riding and decided to introduce him to reining trainer Marco Manzi. That introduction fueled what would become a life-long passion for the sport.

After a few years of being around horses, Ricotta realized training was easy for him and he enjoyed it.

“The horses I was working on seemed to understand what I was asking them to do and the trainer I was with said I was a good hand and had a lot of feeling in spite of little experience,” Ricotta said. “I believed it and worked hard and I finally realized that horses had become part



of my life. Now it is a lifestyle and I love it!”

In 2006, Ricotta competed at the FEI World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany, on the Italian team. Hall of Fame inductee and Two Million Dollar Rider Tim McQuay had been watching the young trainer and offered him a job. Grateful for the opportunity and excited about the new experience, Ricotta said yes and moved to Texas in January 2007.

Today, Ricotta counts McQuay, as well as 2010 Hall of Fame inductee Jack Brainard, as his mentor and is happily living his dream. He’s been in the finals at several major shows, including the NRHA Futurity, the NRHA Derby and the National Reining Breeders Classic, and ridden horses like Mifillenum and Hollywoodstinstown.

“I will always be thankful for the people and friends that have been supporting me so far,” Ricotta said. ♦

#### CURRENT TOP 20 (As of shows input December 8, 2009)

Rider	Earnings
1 Shawn Florida	\$579,457
2 Andrea Fappani	\$237,154
3 Craig Schmersal	\$206,492
4 Randy Paul	\$173,556
5 Casey Hinton	\$165,027
6 Marco Ricotta	\$158,437
7 Tim McQuay	\$139,248
8 Bernard Fonck	\$136,730
9 Matt Mills	\$114,123
10 Cody Sapergia	\$113,195
11 Rudi Kronsteiner	\$110,252
12 Michael Boyle	\$104,272
13 Jordan Larson	\$90,207
14 Michael Davis	\$85,031
15 Todd Bergen	\$83,857
16 Michael McEntire	\$74,746
17 Justin Mathison	\$66,731
18 Wayne LaFortune	\$65,470
19 Dell Hendricks	\$63,890
20 Casey Deary	\$63,634