

THE COWBOY KING OF THE MOVIES BRINGS A TECHNICOLORFUL PERSONALITY TO THE MIKE

WHEN Roy Rogers started riding the airwaves last fall, radio stardom seemed just a bit superfluous for the King of the Cowboys. Idol of small boys everywhere, the horse-opera hero had made countless appearances with the rodeo all over these United States, sung and pranced his way across the screen in scores of "musical Westerns," accounted for more paid admissions at movie box-offices alone than any other Hollywood personality. His fan mail averaged more than 50,000 letters a month, had reached an all-time high of 64,000 in one 30-day period. There really didn't seem to be very much to add to a fame like that.

Yet, since the weekly "Roy Rogers Show" took the microphone into camp, via Mutual, the slim blond's fan mail has leaped another 20 percent or so, apparently knows no limits except the capacity of Uncle Sam's mail trucks. It seems that radio did have something to offer the shootin' star—and vice versa. That's no surprise to old-time West Coast dialers, those who can remember when the lad was broadcasting from local Los Angeles stations. Roy made his mike debut, back in 1931, as one of "Uncle Tom Murray's Hollywood Hillbillies," eventually worked up to singing with his own "Sons of the Pioneers" for 3 to 4 hours a day, long before Republic Pictures signed him to a contract.

Roy's earlier air success, however, was something short of sensational. Before film moguls discovered him, he never made much of a mark, either as singer or as cowboy. Raised on an Ohio farm, he knew nothing of ranch life in his childhood except what he saw in Tom Mix movies, had never seen any faster steppers than the plodding plow horses with which he worked—or which he occasionally rode, bareback, to village "square dances," where he officiated as a "caller." No bronc-buster as yet, he also hadn't learned that he could sing even better than he could shout.

The one thing Roy knew at that time was hard work and plenty of it. After leaving high school in his teens to toil in a shoe factory, he tried many trades all over the country—carpentry, truck driving, house painting, clerking, road building—in between attempts to barnstorm with varied groups of "cowboy bands." Only two incidents shine out from those days of discouragement and drudgery.

One took place in Roswell, New Mexico, where Bob and the other "Rocky Mountaineers" were stranded and close to starving, with only enough money for gas for their ancient jalopy. The wandering minstrels made a deal with the local broadcasting station to make music over the air in return for their autocourt lodgings, then put the time to good use by

ROGERS

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making folksy appeals to listeners for "home-cooked" food! Response was terrific—particularly two luscious lemon pies contributed by a pretty brunette named Arlene Wilkins. Roy was much impressed, corresponded with the charming "baker" for three solid years, until she came to Hollywood. Today, Miss Wilkins is Mrs. Rogers.

The other noteworthy incident was the spell he spent in Montana, somewhere in that three-year period, working as a ranch hand and really learning to ride the range, rope a steer, round up cattle. Today, Roy is an outstanding horseman with many trophies to his credit, performs all his own stunts, was responsible for training Trigger, his equine co-star. He has, in fact, not only taught the golden Palamino to do more tricks than almost any other "high school horse" in history, but is giving a similar education to three "stand-in" steeds—all nearly-exact replicas of Trigger, even to bearing the same name, just in case.

In many ways, 32-year-old Roy seems very little like a rootin'-tootin' Western star. His features are so classically handsome that they appeal to women movie-goers as well as to prairie-struck youngsters. His voice is of such good quality that critics have complained that he sings "too well" to specialize in cowboy songs. But no one will ever mistake the King of the Cowboys for a matinee idol or an operatic tenor—not while his wardrobe holds out!

The equestrian fashion-plate has some 150 suits, all of them glorified "frontier" creations. They range from a chic ensemble of tight orange trousers and white jacket with matching trim to a patriotic outfit of red, white and blue. There isn't a conventional business suit in the lot, unless you call being a cowboy king "a business." Come to think of it—with the kind of money that movies, radio and rodeo are gladly paying Roy—what else would (or could) you call it?