

Belt buckles represent the allure of the rodeo



SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Rance Bray rides Dippin Queenie during the buckle winners' Saddle Bronco Riding event at the 2003 California Rodeo Salinas.

By **GEORGE WATKINS**

The Salinas Californian

Hockey has the Stanley Cup. Football has its Super Bowl rings. Baseball has its World Series trophy.

And the California Rodeo Salinas has its belt buckle.

There are several reasons why the Salinas rodeo attracts some of the top riders and ropers from the Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association every July.

The money's good — the California Rodeo Salinas ranks No. 14 on the list of the PRC's top 50 highest-paying rodeos with a purse of about a \$300,000 — the livestock is consid-

ered some of the best, and the level of competition is National Finals Rodeo-caliber.

But if you asked most any rider or roper what brings them back to the California Rodeo Salinas, somewhere near the top of the list is the custom-designed, gold-and-silver trophy belt-buckle awarded to the winner of the individual events.

The buckle is discussed in almost reverent terms.

"This buckle has been one of my dreams," said Brad Harter, after winning the saddle bronc event here last year.

Ryan Gray is one of the fortunate few to have won two California Rodeo Salinas buckles. He is the

current two-time bareback bronc defending champion.

"I was thrilled to win a buckle here last year (2004), and I feel blessed to have two," Gray said after his win in 2005.

Considering the level of competition, winning a California Rodeo Salinas buckle rates right up there with trying to win an NFR world championship.

"If you look at the cover of Pro Sports News, there's Ryan Jarrett wearing his Salinas buckle," Sally Hamana, marketing coordinator for the California Rodeo Salinas, said.

Jarrett was the All-

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Clay Tryan and Allen Bach, buckle winners in the Dally Team Roping event, rope a steer during the 2003 California Rodeo Salinas.