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PHOTO: BILL HEARD



Five-Time Winner Mark Holland: A Force to Be Reckoned With

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 3, 2004) Although he didn't win this year's Bus Rodeo, Division 9's Mark Holland had been in the winner's circle more times than most any other Metro Bus operator – five times to be exact.

As Metro's champion, he first represented the agency at the APTA International finals in 1988 in Montreal. Then, there was San Antonio in 1995, Orlando in 1999 and Philadelphia in 2001.

During the 2003 event in Salt Lake City, Holland found himself competing against operators from across the U.S. and Canada while maneuvering over an unfamiliar and difficult obstacle course. He went over the time limit, but managed to capture third place. "I was fortunate to get it," he recalls.

A 21-year Metro veteran, Holland, 44, is a tall, lanky man with a brash manner. He faces each competition with full confidence that he will walk away with the trophy. "You can't come in with, 'I might win.' You have to come in with, 'I will win!'"

Man with a plan

Beyond the confidence, however, Holland is a man with a plan.

He works hard all year long to keep his driving and personnel records clean so he's eligible to compete. And, realizing that he only has to be among the top 30 to make the local finals, he doesn't overreach himself in the preliminary round that precedes every Bus Rodeo.

- "I'm always thinking about the Rodeo."

-- Rodeo champ

Mark Holland

When he wins, he usually has come from somewhere back in the pack. "It's a deliberate act," he says. "I function better under pressure."

And pressure is what he – and other champs like Division 1's Sam Morales, who carried Metro's banner in San Francisco in 2000 – have found at the International finals.

Both men agree that the local Bus Rodeo is easy compared to that event. In Salt Lake City, last year, Holland was given a map of the obstacle course to memorize and joined other competitors for an orientation ride around the course.

A mental game

That was it until he took his seat behind the wheel for the real thing. "It has to be more mental than anything else," he says.

In fact, it's pretty much a mental game all year long for Holland.

"To me, driving a bus day-to-day is like a form of the Rodeo," he says. "It's always on my mind. When I make my stops, when I make turns, when I'm pulling out of bus zones, I'm always thinking about the Rodeo."

This year's Holland's plan went awry and, despite his best efforts, he never moved beyond the fifth place he scored in the preliminaries. Instead, his Division 9 colleague Luduvico Castro rose from fourth place to win the 2004 Metro Bus Rodeo and the right to attend the International finals in Atlanta.

Still, Mark Holland is always a force to be reckoned with – whether at the local level or at the International finals. And he isn't kidding when he says, "I'm pretty intense when it comes to this competition."

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