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With his wife, Veronica, and his family by this side, Operator Sam Morales celebrates his third Bus Roadeo victory. Also on hand providing congratulations was Deputy CEO John Catoe.



PHOTOS: ARLENE LIM

## Bus Roadeo Victory is Sweet for Veteran Operator Sam Morales

- A one-point squeaker puts him in winner's circle after last year's fourth-place finish

By ARLENE LIM

(Aug. 2, 2005) "Last year, I ended up fourth place. I made a mistake and it cost me 25 points. Without that mistake I would have won," said Sam Morales as he watched his competition, last Saturday, at the 2005 Metro Bus Roadeo.

This year, there was no mistaking the Central City Division 1 operator's first-place finish, one point ahead of last year's Roadeo winner, Luduvico Castro of San Gabriel Valley Division 9.

Morales, a veteran of the Roadeo circuit has competed in every Roadeo since 1983. He's placed second at least four or five times - that he can recall - fourth in last year's competition, and has participated in two APTA



Central City Division Operator and  
Rodeo champ Sam Morales.

International Rodeo finals.

Each year, as the Rodeo approaches, Morales says the streets he drives become a course. "On the street, I practice by pin-pointing little stuff, soda cans or paper and I try and hit it with the tire."

### **'It's a mental thing'**

He says the biggest component is concentration. "It's a mental thing. It's not like driving on the street; you have to really know each obstacle. Know how to go in and out and set up for the next one."

Recalling his run on the course, Morales said the left and right turns were the hardest, while the reverse was the easiest.

Beyond the annual competition, Morales looks forward each year to seeing his fellow operators from the different divisions.

"I see them once a year, and this is it – the finals. We get together and discuss how we do every single obstacle differently," said Morales. "And that's one thing that we have – every year, we get to catch up on old times."

After hearing that he had won the coveted first-place spot, Morales was overjoyed.

### **'This one feels special'**

"I've been in the top five most of the time. But this one feels special..." said Morales, who then took a moment to compose himself. "Because my whole family is here."

In fact, since his first Rodeo in 1983, his family has been at his side at each competition.

"Today, I'm going to celebrate with a barbeque and after that, we start thinking about the next competition – get ready for the next one. We want to take it all," Morales said.

The competition at the APTA Internationals is tough, so after the celebration comes practice.

"I'll be practicing every day as I work," said Morales. "The obstacles are exactly the same but the pressure is there."

Actually, the celebration isn't quite over. Division 1 Transportation Manager Sonja Owens says there will be a big party. "I'm elated for

Sammy. It's a good thing for him; it's a good thing for the division."

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