



# Great Basin Sun

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## Louis Bidart is a 100,000-mile cowboy



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By Forrest Newton-  
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WINNEMUCCA - During the Nevada Cattlemen's Association Convention and Trade Show in Winnemucca in November of last year, two men were recognized for riding at least 100,000 miles during their lifetime of cowboying. One was Monte Shangle and the other was Louis Bidart of Humboldt County.

"I'm just one of the old timers left around," Bidart said.

He was born at the Winnemucca Hotel in 1920 and since that time he hasn't lived outside the county.

His father, Michel Bidart, came from southern France and his mother, Francisca Montero, came from Spain, but they didn't find each other until their paths crossed in California. His dad was a sheepherder and made his way to Nevada doing just that until he finally bought a ranch.

Louis was the number two child in the family, which eventually consisted of six boys and two girls. The need to have help on the ranch in those days prevented Bidart from getting past eighth grade at the Leonard Creek Ranch School, but he has found life fine even without the diploma.

"Times were tough and I didn't go to high school. I went to work," he said. "But we raised pretty near all the food we needed. We were lucky there."

Originally, the Bidarts operated a sheep business just up the way from the Leonard Creek Ranch and in 1925 bought it from the Miller and Lux Corporation, one of the largest landowners in the United States then and owner of many of the ranches in the area. Over the years his family gradually moved their operation from sheep to cattle.

"They only started with six cows, milk cows and like that, to build up the herd," he said. Eventually, they built up to 1,800 head of cows and discontinued their association with sheep in 1947.

Up until this year Bidart still helped out shearing sheep and branding cows for Buster Dufurrena. Rodeoing was not one of his primary interests over the years because "We had plenty of rodeoing at the ranch," he said.

When they transitioned from horses to tractors around 1941 to do the work, they continued to use saddle horses for working cattle. As he recalls, their first tractor was an International Farmall.

The Miller and Lux Corporation was having problems at some of their ranches and asked Bidart for assistance.

"They had trouble keeping foremen and managers all the time, so they asked me to go over and help for a while so I did, and I was there 11 years," Bidart said. Those 11 years on the Paiute Ranch began in 1955 and didn't end until 1966.

Shortly after that, he and his brother Leonard bought out a farm equipment dealership in Winnemucca and spent the next 18 years as Humboldt County businessmen.

They sold the Bidart Brothers Machinery and Allis-Chalmers dealership many years ago, but customers were not willing to let them go and continued to call on him until he finally called it quits just this year.

"I finally learned how to say no," he said, laughing.

He learned some things about working on farm equipment on the ranch, but most of his experience came from the business and the Allis-Chalmers schools.

"I learned the balers and that stuff real good. I really got good with them," Bidart said. For a long time they were the only dealer in northern Nevada even into southern Oregon. But equipment then was not as complicated as it is today where, he said, you have to be an electronic technician to work on equipment anymore.

The years between 1959 and 1969 were also spent as a Humboldt County commissioner at a time when there were only three commissioners and they served two year terms.

"It took up so much of my time. There was no money in it then," he said.

Most of that time he was at Paiute, making it a round trip of over 200 miles for meetings. But he said being a commissioner was a good education in county government.

In those days there was no county administrator and the chairman kept the rest of the board apprised of what was happening. His last couple of years on the board he chaired the commission.

Meeting up with Mari was as easy as going over to the Wilder Creek Ranch next door. "I just fell in love with her," he said. Bidart noted that not only was she beautiful then, but still is. They spent their honeymoon in Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Married Sept. 18, 1948, Mari remembers that she wanted to be married in June, but they had to wait until the cattle were shipped, haying resolved and myriad of ranching responsibilities completed before it could happen.

They raised three children. Son David died in Vietnam in 1968. Lynda Walton is a teacher at Sonoma Elementary School, Bruce Bidart lives in Eugene, Ore., and Casey Bitz makes his home in Houston, Texas. They have 10 grandchildren.

He enjoys taking care of their yard, but lately it has been taking more out of him than he is willing to give. He has planted a few tomato plants and that may be it for this year's garden. He still enjoys fishing, but his hunting days may be behind him. Today a knock on the door would probably find him reading a book. Their dog's name is Lil' Prec' but sometimes there is no telling who he is trying to protect.

"I've been a resident of Humboldt County all my life. I really like Humboldt County. Sometimes you think other places are better, but then I'm not sure we don't live in the best place yet."

Mari remembers a time when her husband needed an operation for an aneurysm and they were having trouble getting a timely operation scheduled in Nevada. Their nephew, Dr. Chad Bidart, a heart specialist, worked at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Ariz. then and suggested they come there. "I'm not going on foreign soil," Louis said.