

Express-News



Strait's streak goes on: In Top 10 for 30 years

By Hector Saldaña

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George Strait's latest achievement is a record that may never be broken, a testament to the longevity, consistency and superstar status of San Antonio's country king.

On Tuesday, Billboard reported Strait's single "I Gotta Get to You" had hit No. 9 on its Country Songs chart, making him the only artist to score at least one Top 10 hit for 30 consecutive years.

The streak began in 1981 with "Unwound."

"I Gotta Get to You" is Strait's 82nd country Top 10 hit, ranking him behind only country gentleman Eddy Arnold, who scored 92 in his career.

"It just continues to be one heck of a ride that I'm enjoying every minute of," Strait said through a spokesman. "Time does fly when you're having fun. Thanks to all of my fans for their support. Long live country music!"

Insiders are impressed.

"It's extremely difficult to maintain that relevancy across multiple decades and multiple shifts in styles," said Silvio Pietroluongo, Billboard's director of charts. "It tells us that he's been consistent and

hasn't really strayed much from his original sound, but he's kept his music contemporary enough that it can fit on country radio from the '80s until now, which is no small feat. He's the country king.”

According to the Recording Industry Association of America, Strait has sold 68.5 million albums, ranking him among the best-selling artists of all time. Nielsen SoundScan reports his latest album, “Twang,” has sold 551,000.

In comparison, Mariah Carey has charted in the Top 10 for 20 straight years. Elvis Presley managed an 11-year streak, and Madonna had a 10-year run of consecutive Top 10s. Michael Jackson's longest stretch was three years.

Longtime music journalist Chet Flippo ranks Strait with Frank Sinatra in stature, calling him “the Gary Cooper of country music.”

Flippo, a former Rolling Stone writer who now reports via his Country Music Television “Nashville Skyline” column, is one of the few critics who have extensively interviewed “the friendly, if reserved” star.

“I've thought about his appeal,” Flippo said. “He's got some constants that are his appealing factors. ... He's a straight shooter. He's a man's man and a woman's man, and ... he has one of the best pairs of ears in the business. He can just hear a good song.”

Strait is known to plow through hundreds of songs to choose the dozen or so that end up on each album.

“He's also never given in to be tempted to try any fad or any kind of trend,” Flippo said. “He just stays straight ahead with that traditional sound.”