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ALLEN RAY



# A Rodeo for Ranch Cowboys

By BARNEY NELSON

A NEW form of western entertainment—a rodeo for working cowboys—has recently gained popularity and is springing up across the West. Its appeal, like rodeo in its beginning, lies in watching local ranch cowboys test their skills.

The first step in putting on a cowboy rodeo is selecting a good committee. Ours, in Alpine, Tex., consisted of a banker (money), a newspaper editor (publicity), a brand inspector (ranch addresses), a saddlemaker (free prizes), assistant manager of our favorite watering hole (meeting place), two professional rodeo people (expertise), me as chairman (enthusiasm), and two ranch managers (enthusiasm tempering). And we were not rookies; cumulatively, we had probably put on a hundred rodeos for peewees to professionals, and this would be a snap, or so we thought.

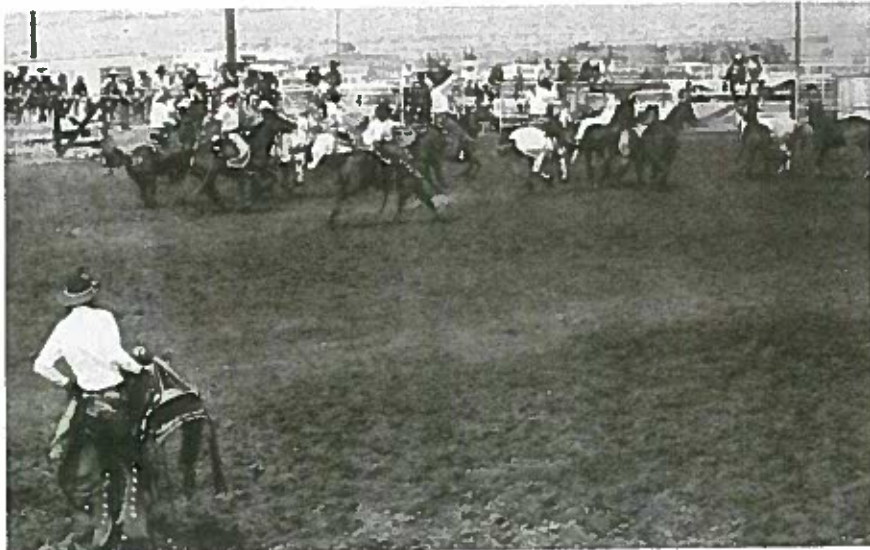
None of us had ever seen a ranch rodeo before and our banker assured us we didn't have any money despite his presence, but those were only minor details that didn't stop us. We met for an evening of brainstorming at the meeting place and used a program from a ranch cowboy rodeo held in another part of the state as a jumping-off point.

We decided our ranch rodeo should represent the community, should be fun, and should be of a controllable size that we could run off in one afternoon and easily gather stock for. In addition, we wanted each ranch entered to be knowledgeable and responsible for their employees and livestock that would be involved.

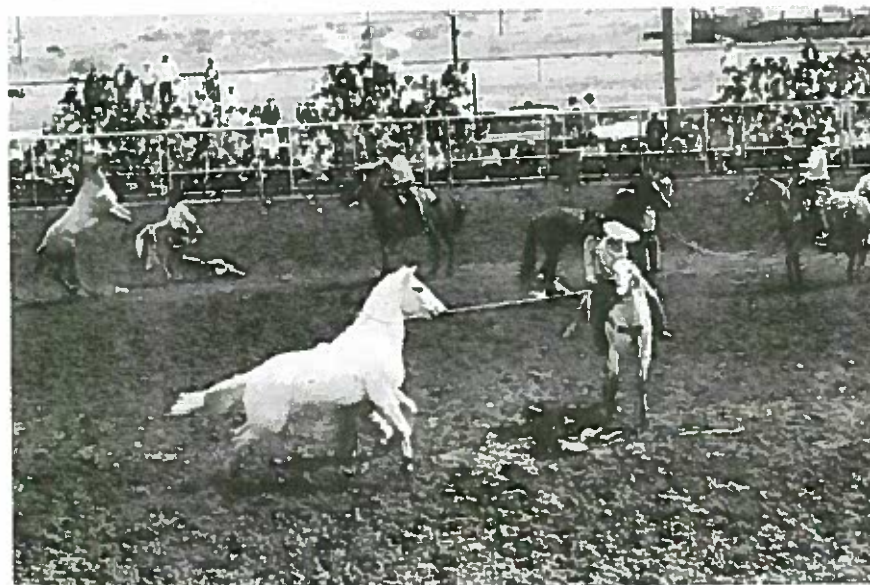
We settled on limiting the entries to teams representing various ranches; each must field a team with a minimum of four and a maximum of six contestants, and must enter each event. Contestants also had to be full-time employees of the ranch who had worked there for at least four months. This was a hard decision because it cut out many of our smaller ranches and the good day-workers in the area.

Contestants would be required

Only local ranch cowboys can compete in events designed to test their skills and entertain the fans.



Although the horses used in the horse catching were gentle, they all spooked and ran when the ropers came thundering after them. Photo Courtesy Joe Richardson



Once the horses were roped, they had to be saddled and ridden to the judges. Photo Courtesy Livestock Weekly

to compete in full cowboy regalia: leggin's, long-sleeved shirts, cowboy hats, boots, spurs, etc. They had to use horses that belonged to them or to the ranch. Ranch boundaries had to encompass a portion of our part of Texas.

These rules, we felt, would keep the rodeo local, prevent a ranch from hiring our local college rodeo team for the day, prevent the ranch cowboys from borrowing crackerjack rodeo horses, and keep the entries at a level we could handle.

Each ranch would pay entry fees of \$25 per event to enter, and we used that money to order printed ribbons for prizes, plaques for the winners, and pay for a standby ambulance. Nobody would make any money, but we could have a great time and maybe not lose too much either. Ranch managers were required to sign the entry blank, and each contestant signed a release to compete.

We called upon the pro-rodeo committee members to help decide how long each event would take to

run oil, and what kind of stock we needed to find. We came up with a three-hour rodeo, if we allowed a maximum of eight ranch teams to enter, and included team roping, team penning, bronc riding, wild cow milking, team branding, and a horse catching, plus a ranch wives queen contest and kids calf scramble. If more than eight ranch teams entered, we'd draw names from a hat. In the end, only seven teams entered by our deadline, so the drawing was not necessary.

In the horse catching, each ranch provided its own horse, which was turned loose with the others. At the signal, the ranch's team had to rope the horse, saddle him, and race to the judges. The fastest time won. It didn't sound too exciting at first since the horses were not broncs, but they hadn't been to town much, and they weren't used to having seven cowboys riding at them swinging loops, or being saddled in a race for time.

One horse catcher picked his little boy's 20-year-old horse for the event. Old Peanuts hadn't been out of a trot, or fully awake in



Action in the wild cow milking. Jimmy Martinez of the Dyer Rancho Espuela is about to peg it on his cow while his milker and mucker run after him. In the background, JA Ranch cowboys struggle with their cow. Photo Courtesy Christi Dillard

years. He is normally caught by roping and would be a cinch, the cowboy thought. But Peanuts hadn't been to a rodeo before, and didn't want to blow his one chance, so he ran and kicked, fought the rope, and nearly pulled the surprised cowboy out of the saddle—as did all the "cinch" horses

the other ranches had picked. Some swore Peanuts grinned all the way back to the ranch.

Every event was altered to suit our arena, judges, or stock. In the saddle bronc riding, every ride was judged on a normal score of 1-25 for the horse and 1-25 for the rider by each judge, but with a bonus of

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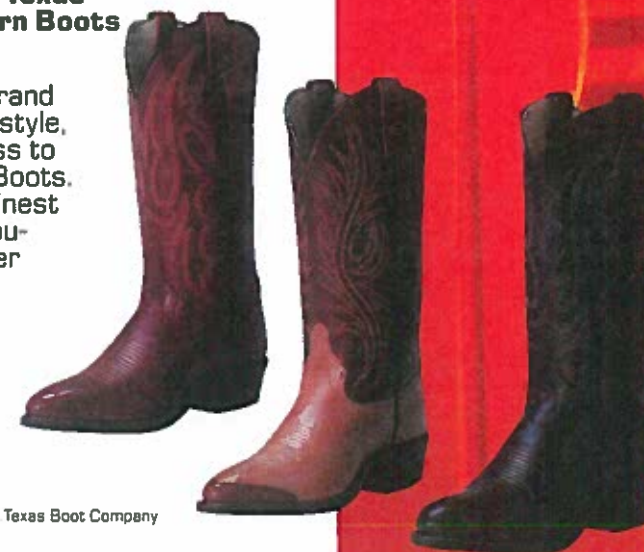
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20 points for making it to the whistle. Surprisingly, the oldest (pushing 50) cowboy entered rode the rankest horse and fanned him with his hat every jump, marking a whopping 92 points—and he hasn't quit bragging since.

In the team penning, the contestants had to pen their designated cut into a holding pen at the end of the arena and shut the gate to end their time. The gate shutting turned out to be one of the highlights as excited team members shut one another in the pen with the cattle, slammed gates into each other, and made flying leaps off their horses. No one thought to designate *who* would shut the gate until it was time to shut it! The team penning proved to be the best crowd pleaser of all the events.

Our judges turned out to be our greatest asset. Brothers Chuck and Cody Lambert, both seasoned PRCA rodeo cowboys, volunteered their services without pay. They have a tough old cowboy grandfather who ranches in New Mexico and taught them the finer points of cowboy etiquette and skills before they "went astray." They work all rodeo events, can clown, pick-up, break colts, train race horses and dance. They dressed by the code, complete with wrist cuffs and wild rags, and were able to make split-second decisions on rules and starting lines.

Ranches dressed their teams in matching shirts, some with brands sewn on the back, and matching silk bandannas. Some teams even carried flags in the National Finals-style grand entry.

As their horsemanship test,



The team penning proved the best crowd pleaser. Here, members of the winning Means Y6 and Moon Ranch race to shut the gate. Photo Courtesy Joe Richardson

ranch wives rode a western pleasure pattern. They also modeled their modern, historical, or working ranch wife attire; and answered one humorous question over a microphone as a test of personality. Questions ranged from "What's the dumbest thing your husband ever did as a cowboy?" to "What advice would you give a young girl about to marry a cowboy?"

Following one quick circle around the arena and the questions, the judges made a snap decision and chose the queen on the spot. Joy Adams of the JA Ranch charmed them with her answer to the latter question: "You need a hard head and an iron stomach!" and received a gold charm and bouquet of bandanna-tied daisies.

Even the program was fun to put together and sold like hotcakes as businessmen got into the spirit and designed history-packed, ranch-cowboy related ads. Each entered ranch was featured with a brief history, photographs, and a drawing of the ranch brand.

Our point system was the simplest possible—seven points for first and one point for seventh. We did away with an all-around cowboy since cowboys were representing their respective ranches and had no voice, usually, in how many events they could enter. We had instead a hard-luck cowboy who was chosen by the judges.

The kids calf scramble was sponsored by Mack Altizer who was producing a PRCA rodeo in the evenings at the same time. Mack tied money on the tails of several calves for the kids to chase



The winner of the ranch wives queen contest, Joy Adams of the JA Ranch, dressed in working attire, while Martha Fowler of the McIntyre-Morrow Ranch was "historically attired." Photo Courtesy Christi Dillard

through the mud (it always rains in Alpine during rodeos) and he presented each kid brave enough to face the muddy arena with a Bad Company Rodeo cap.

Of course, we made mistakes. We drew for position in the team branding, but it still gave a bad disadvantage to the last team to rope as there was only one unbranded calf left in the herd, and the team had to catch that particular one. If we had numbered the calves, each team would have had to rope a particular calf and it would have been more even.

Also, we planned to use a chalk line in the team branding to start the time, and the roper would have to cross it with the calf before the flankers could flank the calf. But we placed it too far from the herd and the calves had to be dragged an unnecessary distance. It could have been disastrous since it was a timed event, but the ropers were good cowboys first, and competitors second, and handled the calves as easily as possible.

This kind of a rodeo requires very little stock. Ours needed seven head of ranch mama cows with their calves for the wild cow milking and team branding, seven head of *something* to rope (ranch cowboys aren't used to horned Corrientes) for the team roping, and for the bronc riding, seven horses that buck if flanked—which most ranch horses will do if coaxed. The cows, calves, and roping cattle can be combined for the



"I like the rich taste, but I could do without the cinders."

team penning if necessary, plus any other cattle that are available. An idea we plan to incorporate into the next rodeo is a contest between the ranches to furnish the rankest bucking horse from their own remuda—the rancher with the best bronc will receive a prize.



Mark Daughtery of Blakemore's 111 Ranch shows how it's done in the bronc riding. Photo Courtesy Christi Dillard

## SUGGESTED RULES

**Horse Catching.** All riders lope into arena, dismount in front of grandstand, unsaddle, and turn horse loose. Catchers enter arena and at signal from judges rope their ranch's horse and lead it back to rider who resaddles, rebridles and rides to judge. Standard stock saddles, no trick cinches. Judges place 1, 2, 3.

**Ranch Wives Queen Contest.** One representative for each team entered. Dress modern, historical, or working and ride a simple western pleasure pattern called out by announcer. Asked one humorous question by judges over microphone. Judges pick the queen.

**Team Penning.** Three head of live-stock per team are turned into arena as a herd and held by mounted assistants until they settle. As competing team passes judge, time is started and assistants move back against a fence. Time is final only after all three head (designated by numbers or color) are in pen and gate is closed. Five-minute time limit, or less, depending on nature of the cattle. Cutters must walk horses into herd. Assistants re-gather herd after each team works and settle them. Draw for position and stock.

**Kids Calf Scramble.** Several calves turned into arena with money tied to their tails. All kids in grandstand invited to participate, but there is a 12-year age limit. Littlest kids given head start.

**Team Roping.** Catch as catch can, three loops. If header misses or steer runs through loop, okay for heeler to catch head. No barrier; steers chute run; ropers can tie or dally. Event timed, five-second penalty for one heel. Draw for position.

**Bronc Riding.** Standard stock saddle, no bronc saddles, no night latch. We furnished halters; each cowboy furnished his preferred rein or reins. Ride as ride can; okay to touch horse, okay to grab horn, use two reins, blow stirrups, etc. No sharp spurs; cowboy disqualified by judges if horse is cut. Draw for position and chute run broncs (or can draw for stock).

**Team Branding.** Roper, two flankers, and one brander. Time starts when roper rides past judge. Must walk horse into herd, which is held by arena assistants. Calves are heeled, five-second penalty for one heel. Brander has brand in bucket of paint, can't remove brand until rope is off heels, or five-second penalty. Time stops when brander places brand back into bucket. Draw for position and stock.

**Wild Cow Milking.** All teams rope at one time, any cow! A mugger and milker are on foot. Roper catches cow, mugger subdues with aid of roper, and milker races to finish line where milk must pour or no placing. Placings not official until team has removed rope from cow. No heeling or tripping. Ropers may dally or tie; neck, horns, or half-head catches legal. Judges place 1, 2, 3.

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