

Western Heritage Alive and Well at Farmfair - January 19, 2007 Horses All

By Denice Stewart

Farmfair International, hosted by Northlands Coliseum held the second annual Heritage Ranch Rodeo November 3 through 5, 2006 with this year's event being even more exciting than the previous year.

The Heritage Ranch Rodeo is typical of many of the ranch rodeos and gives the working cowboys a chance to showcase their cowboy skills while their families and spectators have a little fun in the capital city.

This year's event brought together the best ranch teams from western Canada with the ranch rodeo and ranch horse competition.

Ranches from the four western provinces competed in the Heritage Ranch Rodeo events. The first two performances of the ranch rodeo began with all 13 teams competing in the team sorting, branding, and doctoring, as well as wild cow milking, wild horse racing, and bronc riding.

Additionally, each ranch designated one of their team members to compete in the Working Ranch Horse competition to demonstrate their horsemanship skills as one of the qualifying events.

Team sorting proved to be a tough go for most of the ranches with only four of the eight qualifying teams getting a time. A herd of numbered cattle are held at one end of the arena. As the team of four cross the starting line, the cattle number is called and the contestants have to cut these three head out of the herd and put them in a pen at the opposite end of the arena.

Any team that let more than four steers over the finish line were disqualified. The Sears Ranch team of Nanton, AB, demonstrated their livestock handling abilities by getting this done in an astonishing 46.32 seconds.

The Porcupine Quill Ranch of Pincher Creek, AB, offered them some stiff competition finishing second in the event with a time of 53.57 seconds, followed by the Willows Ranch of Buck Lake, AB, at 1 minute 6 seconds and the Leslie Ranch of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, with a time of 1 minute 30 seconds.

The team doctoring event simulates doctoring cattle in a pasture environment when a team of four work the herd, locate the animal identified as "sick," and get it headed and heeled.

Once the sick animal is headed and heeled the remaining two team members may not assist in any way. The header must then dismount, leaving his horse to keep the head catch tight, and slap the steer to signal that he has "doctored" the animal.

Time is called when the doctor is back in the saddle. The Bews family, representing the Bar U Ranch, Longview, AB, got this task accomplished in 39.47 seconds, followed by the hands at the Rocking P Ranch of Nanton, AB, in 44.92 seconds. The Willows Ranch completed the task in a time of 1:30.42 followed by the Porcupine Quill Ranch with a time of 1:45.71.

In the team branding, the Leslie Ranch cowboys roped, drug to the fire, and branded all three of their calves in a time of 2:09.28, followed by the Rocking P with a time of 2:11, the Bar U at 2:54 and Willows Ranch at 2:56.

Time penalties were assessed for bringing a calf to the fire with only one leg caught. Disqualifications could be assessed for losing your rope, not consistently branding at the same location or dragging a calf across the line with a high single hock.

The wild cow milking is always an exciting event and this ranch rodeo was no different. Cranky cows charged saddle horses, tossed the milkers, and even dragged a couple of cowboys in, what looked like, sand surfing.

This event simulates the need to get a new calf started on mother's milk. Often times, a first calf heifer will neglect a calf and the cowboy would have to rope the heifer and milk her out. For ranch rodeo purposes the rules are "catch as catch can" or get the job done no matter how pretty the loop.

The cow can be caught by the head or heeled. A mugger will try to get on the head to brace the cow so that the milker can get enough milk in the bottle, race back to the judge, and demonstrate that there is enough milk to pour into the judge's cup of coffee.

In this event, the cowboys from the Rocking P finished the job in 44.75 seconds, Sears Ranches at 54.22 seconds, Willows Ranch at 57.81 seconds and the Porcupine Quill Ranch with a time of 1 minute and 10 seconds.

The wild horse race event really is not a wild horse at all but a "wild" reaction by a ranch horse. In this event, each of the eight teams leads a broke ranch horse into the arena and holds it at one end.

The start time is called, and the horses are turned loose, only to be roped around the neck by a cowboy on another saddle horse, lead back to the "barn" at the other end of the arena, then hastily saddled, mounted and raced across the finish line.

Many of the saddle horses become indignant from this rushed treatment and express their displeasure the only way they know how and in what ranch cowboys consider "wild" behaviour. The Bar U Ranch took first place in this event with a time of 59.57 seconds, followed by the Sears Ranches with 1:06.63, River Ranch of Riske Creek, BC with a time of 1:07.16 and Willows Ranch at 1:14.41

The Heritage Ranch Rodeo concluded with the bronc riding that goes "ride as ride can," which means do whatever it takes to make the 8-second whistle. The rider uses their standard stock saddle and a bronc shank for this event.

Points are awarded for the difficulty of the horse and for the aggressiveness, control, and exposure demonstrated by the cowboy. The Leslie Ranch took first in this event with a 74 point ride followed by K Bar S Ranch from Eriksdale, Manitoba, with a 72 point ride; Willows Ranch at 71 points; and Rocking P Ranch at 70 points.

When all the dust settled in the UFA Show Hall, Willows Ranch of Buck Lake, AB, placed first for consistently placing in all events. Rocking P Ranch of Nanton, AB, took second; Bar U Ranch caught third; and Leslie Ranch of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, placed fourth.

It was an exciting three days and the cowboys are already anxious to return again next year.